THE JOE KEARNEY PROJECT

INTERVIEWS WITH JOE KEARNEY

BY - CHARLES W. CRAWFORD

TRANSCRIBER - CAROL LANEY

ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE

MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY

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NOVEMBER 18, 1976
FEBRUARY 12, 1976
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FEBRUARY 14, 1977
FEBRUARY 26, 1976

BY CHARLES W. CRAWFORD

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October 22, 1988

TO: Michele Fagan

FROM: Charles Crawford Charles W. Crawford

I am sending the Mississippi Valley Collection the tapes and manuscripts of five interviews with Mr. Joe Kearney. The interviews were conducted on February 12, 1986, February 26, 1976, November 18, 1976, February 8, 1977 and February 14, 1977.

We have no form signed by Joe Kearney concerning the restriction or release of these interviews. Although he lived to be over 100 years of age, Mr. Kearney had never learned to read or write. We discussed the use of his interviews, and he understood that they would be made available for public research use at some time. Our understanding was that he and I would agree on a suitable date for their release. Mr. Kearney died on February 2, 1983, before we had selected a date for release.

By this letter I wish to authorize the release of these interviews for general use on February 2, 1993. I believe this date would be a fair implementation of our understanding with Mr. Kearney.

THIS IS THE ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE OF MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY. THIS PROJECT IS "THE JOE KEARNEY PROJECT." THE PLACE IS MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE. THE DATE IS NOVEMBER 18, 1976, AND THE INTERVIEW IS WITH JOE KEARNEY. THE INTERVIEW IS BY DR. CHARLES W. CRAWFORD, DIRECTOR OF THE MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE AND IS TRANSCRIBED BY CAROL LANEY.

DR. CRAWFORD: This interview is with Mr. Joe Kearney at 2714 Lowell Street at his home. And also here is his great grandson, Adam.

KEARNEY: His name is Elton.

DR. CRAWFORD: Elton.

KEARNEY: Elton Lee.

DR. CRAWFORD: Elton Lee. And you also have some grandchildren?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, I've got some grandchildren, I've got about twelve.

DR. CRAWFORD: And you have....

KEARNEY: Some great, great grandchildren.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, how many great, great grandchildren?

KEARNEY: Four.

DR. CRAWFORD: All right. Well, lets's see, how many children did you have?

KEARNEY: Four.

DR. CRAWFORD: Are they still living?

KEARNEY: All four of them, yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, probably like you, they'll live a long time.

KEARNEY: I hope so.

DR. CRAWFORD: Now, let's see, I ask before when we didn't have the recorder on, about what you remembered when you came here from Sardis, Mississippi, and you remembered what about Main Street?

KEARNEY: I remember Main Street was a mud road. See, that's the old country road, that's up and down Main Street. And where the sidewalk was in there, why, it was put up out of bricks, you know, lay bricks down to run the wagon and to walk on, you know, to keep from getting in the mud. They put that down there then at that time for them to drive on and then when they break through that, why then it was just muddy way down that street.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes sir, now what part of Main Street was paved when you were here?

KEARNEY: Well, it was paved from down at the foot of Main up to Beale, up to--the old jail there at Poplar and--on the other side there.

DR. CRAWFORD: Poplar and Main?

KEARNEY: Poplar and Main, yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: And that's where the jail was?

KEARNEY: That's where the jail was.

DR. CRAWFORD: Now, let's see, the pavement started at the foot of Main.

KEARNEY: Yes sir, down there at the foot of Main Street, down there.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, let's see, was that where Main started?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember what street crossed down there? I know where it is now but I'm not sure where the foot of Main was then.

KEARNEY: Well, let's see, I can't think of the street because it's been so long, you know.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes sir, it's been a while. Well, what about the other streets in Memphis, what were they like then?

KEARNEY: Well, it was just muddy roads. Just like ah, you'd get out here and get off this street on the other one--mud down there.

DR. CRAWFORD: What was it like in wet weather, did they have mud holes?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, they had mud holes all up and down Main Street because it wasn't black top and neither no brick up and down there only where the main part of Main Street. Because I could have bought a lot anywhere on Main Street for $50.00 and paid for it working for fifty cents a day.

DR. CRAWFORD: Is that right?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, were any of the mud holes really big ones or deep ones?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes sir, they was deep enough to drop

down to the hub of the wagon--over the whell you know where the wheel, put the wheel onto the wagon, it was deep enough to drop down that low in places.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you see any wagons ever get stuck.

KEARNEY: Yes sir, I hope get 'em out.

DR. CRAWFORD: What happened when they got stuck.

KEARNEY: They just couldn't pull 'em. They had to block 'em up and jack 'em up just like a person do these cars now and put brick and stuff down there to get it on solid ground to pull it out.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did they have to unload them sometimes?

KEARNEY: Sometimes they did.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, let's see, do you remember any big buildings in the city when you came Mr. Kearney?

KEARNEY: No, none but--the jail--and the courthouse was about the largest building I seen then at that time because Main Street was you know, just off and right on Front and down to the river there. In them days the Mississippi River would freeze over.

DR. CRAWFORD: I'll bet you remember--do you remember the winter of 1917?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, I remember all along through there because I was a nurse around in here at that time, working--Pappy Hadden--Stradden.

DR. CRAWFORD: At Pappy Hadden's place?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. Stradden, see they owned near about all this whole town at that time.

DR. CRAWFORD: What work were you doing for Mr. Hadden?

KEARNEY: Ah, I was cleaning up around the house and working around there, you know, working the flower beds, raking the leaves and when stuff crossed the yard.

DR. CRAWFORD: What was it like during that cold winter?

KEARNEY: Well, I can't hardly tell you because it was so rough. In them times it would start freezing on the fall of the year and it'd be dusty when you get, you know, when the uh, weather comes to breaking, the ice, there'd be just dust on there and then it would get boggy and soggy, but excusing that, why we got along all right.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, did the river freeze over any?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, cause that was where we got our ice for the summer.

DR. CRAWFORD: How did you get that ice out of the river?

KEARNEY: Cut it--put it on top of the other ice and slide it to the outside.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you use a saw or something?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, we had a saw--we'd cut ice and put it in the ice house and have it there when the ice--when the uh--when the uh--summer--ice commence getting down in the summertime, why we had to hold up on using the ice cause it'd freeze thick as that.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, that looks like about two or three feet thick.

KEARNEY: Yes sir, it's thick enough for a mule to be carried across on the Mississippi River.

DR. CRAWFORD: All the way across?

KEARNEY: All the way across.

DR. CRAWFORD: My goodness!

KEARNEY: Without shoes on.

DR. CRAWFORD: And people could walk across too, I guess?

KEARNEY: Yes sir--walk across there.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, the river must have not been running much underneath that ice.

KEARNEY: Yes sir, it was, but--it froze over. I got ice out there many, many times for--for you know the summer, packed it in the ice house for the summer--have ice houses larger than this house and we just pack it in there and put sawdust over it. And when that commenced getting low you had to be slow about using ice then.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, during the late summer, I guess.

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, did they have sawdust between the walls in the ice houses, or something?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, sawdust about that thick in the walls.

DR. CRAWFORD: About a foot or more?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. And then that ice was packed in sawdust. And then it would keep all the summer near about.

DR. CRAWFORD: It would really keep all summer then, huh?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, it's hard for people today with refrigerators to realize what that was like.

KEARNEY: Yes sir, you're right. Because they wouldn't believe it, but it was that way because I hope cut it and put it in there.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, do you remember when you started working for Mr. Hadden?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, I started working when I was about--14 years old--12 or 13 years old, working down there picking the ah--cleaning up around the house, shinning shoes and everything, cause you had to have his shoes shined every morning. And you had to go to his office, why you didn't shine nothing but his heel and toe--.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, how did you meet Mr. Hadden?

KEANREY: Well, we was raised on his place, around in town. He had a place--had houses you know, just like people got now, but then they was put in kind of--in a row, you know--rows just like a house here--one door here and double tennant like. And that's the way they was.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did Mr. Hadden live long after you went to work for him?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes sir, he lived to be a old man. He had plenty of money at that time, wasn't no banks, you know. He had lots of money, then when he died, then, why, they had--it took them three days to bale that money up and send it to Wall Street. It took them three days to get it all bailed up and sent to Wall Street.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember anything about the big Yellow Fever epidemic, Mr. Kearney?

KEARNEY: I was in here right in that time. cause I ah, had to go around on the wagon to pick up the dead. I've got a scar on my arm right now where they vaccinated me for Yellow Fever. And my health was guaranteed again for 25 years.

DR. CRAWFORD: How old do you think you were then?

KEARNEY: I don't know, sir, I was right about grown--cause Yellow Fever--I had to go down on the wagon and pick up the dead.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, did they have any Yellow Fever here before you went to work, or was that the first one after you came?

KEARNEY: That was the first one I know anything about.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did they have any more after that year?

KEARNEY: No sir--didn't have no more after then. Typhoid and Malaria Fever was here. It was pretty rough on them.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, people still have some malaria in some places.

KEARNEY: Yes sir. But--I think I did well during that time.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes sir, you've lived through Yellow Fever and a lot of other things, too.

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you know how old you were when you came here from Sardis?

KEARNEY: No sir, I do not, just to tell the truth

about it, I don't know just exactly how old I was but I know I was a large size boy because I was big enough to run around there and see around the house and take care of the master's shoes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was that in Mississippi or up here?

KEARNEY: I was here during the time I was doing all this work around there, but I was in Mississippi when they brought me away from there why I was ah--working around the house there at my old master's you know.

DR. CRAWFORD: His name was Mr. Kearney too, wasn't it?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, Whit Kearney.

DR. CRAWFORD: Whit Kearney, yes.

KEARNEY: And we worked around his house there until I was a great big boy then. Shined his shoes to go to town, used a ox for his wagon for carrying him to church when he was going. I had to follow behind them to drive that ox across the creek, so they can get on it when they walked a foot log across it to go to church.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, about how far from Sardis did Whit Kearney live?

KEARNEY: About a mile. Lived every bit of a mile or a little better. He had a big plantation there. A lot of people worked on it. My folks and my--my mother and all of them was working on it, but she was the cook at the house and so she didn't do too much work out there on the account of being at the house. And I was just a nurse at the house to keep the eagles from carrying the children off.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, what was your mother's name, Mr.

Kearney?

KEARNEY: Rosie Kearney.

DR. CRAWFORD: Rosie?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, what was your father's name?

KEARNEY: Ned.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, did he stay in Memphis after he came or did he go back to Mississippi?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, he stayed in Memphis. He stayed here until he died.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you have any idea how long Mr. Whit Kearney lived down there after you all came up here?

KEARNEY: No sir, I do not.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, let's see, when you came they did not have the rail road bridge across, did they?

KEARNEY: No sir, cause I hope put that bridge across the Mississippi River, that was the first bridge that was put across there for the trains to go on.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, that was finished in 1892. Did you work on that?

KEARNEY: Me and my daddy. I was on that bridge--working on it. they had the incline railroad down into South Memphis there called the ah--Ravine, it's down there where they go across, carry the boats across on there where they go across, carry the boats across on there and get--hook on the track on the other side and get off on there and go over--across there. And then when they

got that bridge across and then they put the trains pulled across on it.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, do you remember the first train they took across on it?

KEARNEY: I remember the train, but--let me see, it was--I don't know--ICC or Rock Island. I think the Rock Island was the first train they carried across there, if I ain't mistaken.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, they had quite a celebration, I guess when that opened?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, yes sir, they did.

DR. CRAWFORD: Where was that ravine they followed down to the river for the ferry? Was that--

KEARNEY: Down in South Memphis.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was that below where the bridge is now?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, it's below there.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was it very close to it?

KEARNEY: No sir, it was about--two miles down--down there. I could go to it--I look like now but I just can't think. But my father, you know, he was in the slave war. He was sold three times in slavery. And he was in the war, and he showed me the place after--he came to Memphis, where he was when they declared peace.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, he was in Memphis, then, when they did.

KEARNEY: No sir, he was in the army, when they declared peace, you know. And he was in Memphis when they did declare peace. I understand what you was talking about now, but he was here in Memphis when that was done in the Ravine

down there--showed me the breastworks that was down there, where he was fighting, you know.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, was that where the ferry was?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. Just below there.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, did they have any other ferries further up the river?

KEARNEY: No sir, didn't have none only where the boats come in, you know, and out, up there on Front Street and the old jail and the new jail now, so that was down Main Street, now on Front Street.

DR. CRAWFORD What was Beale Street like then?

KEARNEY: Beale Street was a popular street there, that was the main part of town at that time because Pappy--not Pappy but ah--Bob Church and ...I forget his name now, I know it too, but that was a popular place, that was the main part of town with the colored and white at that time because they had the big dancing halls and everything around there. You know the womens all celebrate that place.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, did you ever meet Mr. Bob Church?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, I met him several times.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, you came here quite a while before he did.

KEARNEY: Oh, Lord yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: But what about Mr. Crump, when did you first see him, do you know when you first did?

KEARNEY: No.

DR. CRAWFORD: I know you were here before he came.

KEARNEY: Yes sir. Me and my daddy used to trade with Mr. Crump...down at his store, when we was out

there on (what was the name of the street?) this side of Bingampton, you know where Bingampton is?

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes sir.

KEARNEY: Well, we was out there, living out there at that time, working crops. And we used to trade with Mr. Crump.

DR. CRAWFORD: And he had a store there?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: What are the names of your four children?

KEARNEY: That ones name is Elton--oh, you're talking about--Aline is one and Alma is the other one and Johnny is one and Willie is another one.

DR. CRAWFORD: Which one was born first? Which one of your children is the oldest?

KEARNEY: Willie. She's the oldest. And that's the second one.

DR. CRAWFORD: Now, let's see, that's your great grandson.

KEARNEY: Yes sir. But my daughter went in the door there.

DR. CRAWFORD: Of your children now, which one was born first?

KEARNEY: Willie.

DR. CRAWFORD: You don't remember about what year that was, I guess?

KEARNEY: No sir, I do not.

DR. CRAWFORD: Where were you working then?

KEARNEY: I was in Augusta, Arkansas.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, do you know when you moved over to Augusta?

KEARNEY: Along toward 1912. Somewhere along in there. It was a long time, I can't think of the years,

because I didn't keep up with them. I didn't think this would ever happen.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, you just never know in life, do you?

KEARNEY: No sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you say that you traded at Mr. Crump's store for a while?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, I traded with Mr. Crump for a long time--me and my dad--a long time. Years, but that was before I went to Augusta and Arkansas, so far as that is concerned. That was, of before Crump, cause you'd live up here on the Powers place across the river there on the banks of Wolf River forming there and traded at Crump's. And down here on Macon Road.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, let's see, that was the first time you ever saw Mr. Crump, I guess, Mr. Kearney.

KEARNEY: Oh yes sir, yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: When he had that store.

KEARENY: Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you ever see him much later?

KEARNEY: We'd go out to his store and see him, when we didn't have no business nowheres else.

DR. CRAWFORD: Has your health always been good?

KEARNEY: I ain't never been sick in my life.

DR. CRAWFORD: That's wonderful!

KEARNEY: I ain't never been sick enough to have a doctor in my life.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, I know a lot of people younger than you who have had to have a doctor.

KEARNEY: Yes sir. And as I went on to say, during the Yellow Fever, I don't know just exactly

what time it was, but during the Yellow Fever I was vaccinated then for to go ahead and pick up the dead.

DR. CRAWFORD: But they didn't want you doing that until you were vaccinated?

KEARNEY: No sir, I had to be vaccinated to pick up the dead, cause I'd catch that fever. They give me a shot for that. And this arm, I got it in there and they guaranteed my health for 25 years.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, that was pretty good. Were there a lot of people to pick up then?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, they died. Pass by here in this morning and all's standing out on the porch--come back in the morning and pick 'em up. Dead.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did they have new people to pick up every day, new bodies?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. Every day.

DR. CRAWFORD: Where did they take the bodies then?

KEARNEY: Potter's Field. They died so fast they didn't have no coffin to bury them in, you know, just carry 'em and dump 'em off in there, just like you'd dump off a lot of trash in a pile and just give 'em up and that's the way they did 'em, they died so fast.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, were there other wagons working too?

KEARNEY: No sir, just one dead wagon. Go over the city and pick up the dead.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, well, do you have any idea how many bodies you picked up a day, then?

KEARNEY: No sir, cause we'd start in the morning and just pick 'em up until it got so you can't see.

DR. CRAWFORD: And you picked them up all day and carried them off?

KEARNEY: All day, just all day long. First one place, then another, all across the town.

DR. CRAWFORD: Would you go and empty the wagon and then get more?

KEARNEY: Oh yes sir. Get more, you had to do it; you couldn't pick 'em all up and load in that wagon; all of 'em in there at one time, you can't.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you have any idea how many bodies the wagon would carry when it was loaded?

KEARNEY: Oh, it would carry 3 and 4, 5 or 6 of 'em. Carry 'em to Potter's Field and bury 'em.

DR. CRAWFORD: That was a mule-pulled wagon, I suppose?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: Four wheels?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, where was Potter's Field then?

KEARNEY: It was out ther in South Memphis. They call it Elmwood Cemetery now. But it used to be a Potters field, where they dig deep trenches and bury people.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, how many people did they have digging graves, do you have any idea about that?

KEARNEY: Twelve. Took twelve men steady, all day long digging. Just steady digging, one right after another; putting 'em in there.

DR. CRAWFORD: Ten to twenty men digging?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. All day long' and there's was some coming up, keeping 'em up. You dig 'em and put 'em in there, why the'd be covered up immediately.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you know if any of those men got the Yellow Fever or had they been vaccinated the same way that you had?

KEARENY: Yes sir, they was vaccinated for the Yellow Fever. All of 'em was vaccinated for the Yellow Fever that goes on that wagon.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, that was good.

KEARNEY: And, I was sick here about 10 or 12 years ago, I reckon it was that--and I had a hernia in this side, and glands taken out. And that's all the sickness I ever had.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, that's sure not much.

KEARNEY: The doctor told me then that my health was guaranteed for 18 years and I ain't been sick yet.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, that's good.

KEARENY: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD What parts of town did you pick bodies up in, was it all over?

KEARNEY: All over town.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was some parts worse than others?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, but in the main part was out on the heart of town, not in the heart of town, but on the subburbs--just kind of pick 'em up there scattered about. But right in the heart of town why you picked them up--just go in the house and get 'em and in the next house you might see 'em living and come right back there next morning and pick them up.

DR. CRAWFORD: I guess you picked both kinds of people; black and white, didn't you?

KEARNEY: Black and white, yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you know about where the city limits were then?

KEARNEY: Out there at the Crump Boulevard on--do you know where's Crump Boulevard now?

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes sir.

KEARNEY: That used to be the workhouse, right in there.

DR. CRAWFORD: It was on what's now Crump.

KEARNEY: Crump Boulevard, they call it now. That's right at Crump's old store--where the Buckeye is out there. Do you know where the old Buckeye Mill is out here in town--off the subburbs there.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes

KEARNEY: Well, that's where the city limits was there.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, let's see, about what street was that, do you know, ah, it was on Crump, do you know what crossed it along there?

KEARNEY: Not now I don't.

DR. CRAWFORD: Of course, Lamar out here was the road down into Mississippi then, wasn't it.

KEARNEY: Yes sir. Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: It wasn't part of the city.

KEARNEY: No sir. No sir. The city limits was just one length all the way around at that time.

DR. CRAWFORD: Memphis was pretty small. Do you have any idea who was mayor when you first came.

KEARNEY: No sir, I do not.

DR. CRAWFORD: I guess people didn't think a lot about that then.

KEARNEY: No sir, didn't worry about it. As I said, I know I was around 13 years old when they first come to Memphis. Because I can remember all what was going on at that time, you know.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes sir, what was going on then?

KEARNEY: It's a whole lot of hard boyish work; the Irishmen was doing it, you know, and colored folks was there. And mighty few of them was working, and your colored, Irish did all the work.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, what kind of work were the Irish doing then?

KEARNEY: Digging and fixing streets. Putting down toilets, these old yard toilets, used to have around you know. And clean 'em out, do all such as that. They was regular rough workers, you know. They was kinda like an ox and a mule.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes. And there were a lot of Irish and I don't know what come of 'em.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well now, a lot of them were killed in the Yellow Fever dpidemic and some moved away, I think.

KEARNEY: Yes sir. Some of them moved out from here because I used to go with 'em a whole lot and drink and eat with them. They was my best friends.

DR. CRAWFORD: Where would you go?

KEARNEY: Anywhere they went, why I was right there with 'em.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes. What part of town did they go to mostly.

KEARNEY: Oh, round there in Front Street--North Memphis.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was that before the Civil War?

KEARNEY: That was after the Civil War. Why I don't know much about the Civil War.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, let's see, that was--was that after the Yellow Fever epidemic then?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes sir, that was after it.

DR. CRAWFORD: Some of them stayed around a while. Was that work on the dead wagon your first job after you came to Memphis?

KEARNEY: First job, that I knowed anything to do. Excusing the work around on my pappy's house. I worked around there a long time.

DR. CRAWFORD: Now, let's see, they did not have any more Yellow Fever epidemics after this one you worked in, did they?

KEARNEY: No sir. No sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, what did the doctors do to help the people then?

KEARNEY: He'd vaccinate 'em.

DR. CRAWFORD: Could they do anything after they got it?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes sir, they'd do all right. If that scab that they put on there, come off, you's all right. But if it stuck there, stayed, that arm would get swelled great big and you'd have that fiver, see it would go in, but if your blood is all right it don't stick--it just fall off, and that's the way it was with me.

DR. CRAWFORD: Your blood was sure all right then.

KEARNEY: Yes sir, at that time. I thank the Lord for it, but my blood was in good shape.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did your family go to church then?

KEARNEY: Oh yes sir, went to church.

DR. CRAWFORD: What day is your birthday on, what day in the

year?

KEARNEY: Second of June. This last past June I was a hundred and six years old. And this coming June, if I live to see it, I'll be 107.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, I believe you'll live to see it Mr. Kearney, considering the ones you've seen already I believe your chances are really good.

KEARNEY: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did your family go to church here when you came?

KEARNEY: Oh yes sir, they went to church. Down there in South Memphis.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember what church it was?

KEARNEY: The pastor was Fields. I can't think of all of his name now, but it was Fields.

DR. CRAWFORD: Pastor Fields?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was it a Baptist church?

KEARNEY: Baptist church, yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: And that's where you started going when you first came to Memphis.

KEARNEY: Yes sir. Only church I knowed anything about when I first come where I's at. Of course there was other churches.

DR. CRAWFORD: That's the one you went to; the Baptist church that Pastor Fields had?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you know what street it was located on, or

where it was?

KEARNEY: No.

DR. CRAWFORD: Or what part of town it was in.

KEARNEY: It was South Memphis. Around Tin Cup Alley.

DR. CRAWFORD: Around Tin Cup Alley?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. That was what they called it, Tin Cup Alley.

DR. CRAWFORD: I guess it had another name, but I don't know what it was.

KEARNEY: Oh yes sir, that's me. Can't think of it now.

DR. CRAWFORD: They probably changed the name of Tin Cup Alley later to something else.

KEARNEY: Yes sir. Well that's the only one I knowed anything about at that time, course it was small.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did they later get another pastor?

KEARNEY: Oh yes sir. They got another pastor by the name of...I can't think of all them folks names now.

DR. CRAWFORD: But he was the one.

KEARNEY: Yes sir, he was the one that...

DR. CRAWFORD: That came after ah, Pastor Fields.

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, let's see, what did they call this church; did it have a certain name?

KEARNEY: Baptist church.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, I mean was it a certain one of the Baptist church located somewhere?

KEARNEY: No sir, I don't know just exactly, now

just to be true about it. But I know it was the Baptist church.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, well let's see, before you came up here from Mississippi, what kind of work were you doing down there then, Mr. Kearney?

KEARNEY: I was working around the house there, my mother's cooking for Master.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes.

KEARNEY: Watching the eagles, keep 'em from carrying the children off. And shining his shoes, and see that everything was done around. Keep the eagles from his children, that was the biggest job I had. Watching to keep the eagles from his children. And when I seen them I had to carry them in the house.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you ever see any eagles?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, and they carry off the childrens too. Cause I had a uncle shooted one three times and missed him. Had a child in his claws, carry him to the old country.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, well you sure had to be careful, then.

KEARNEY: Yes sir, cause they'd come and walk across the yard just like a man. And if them children was out there he'd pick him up one and carry it on with him. But I had to watch and carry them in the house when they come along so that they wouldn't get him.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, well you must have been older than the other children.

KEARNEY: Yes sir, I was older cause I had to watch for them. That's how come I had to watch cause I was the oldest child in the family.

DR. CRAWFORD: About how many others were there?

KEARNEY: There was seven of them. Just seven children in the house there that I had to watch.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, that was quite a lot to watch.

KEARNEY: Yes sir. They all out there playing, you know and I had to watch 'em; keep the eagles from getting 'em. Then if a bear come through, I had to get 'em in the house.

DR. CRAWFORD: Were there a lot of woods around?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. Lot of woods; see he had a thirty acre field--lawn around there; you had to go over that to get in there where we was, but I had that to play in. That was our playground. That was his yard.

DR. CRAWFORD: That was a big yard.

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you ever see any soldiers in Mississippi?

KEARNEY: No sir. I never seen nothing but the Yankees when they come through. I seen them after they declared peace, I seen them.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, let's see, what kind of uniforms were they wearing?

KEARNEY: Blue.

DR. CRAWFORD: Were they walking or on horses. They was on horses when they got there, but when they got down and got to walking why they--you know around the house and make 'em open them smokehouses and throw that food out there, why they was walking then. But they come in there on horses.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did they get any food at your place?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes sir, they put it all out; they put

it out of that smokehouse out there in the yard, on the lawn.

DR. CRAWFORD: What did they do then, did they carry it away?

KEARNEY: Them coloreds had to pick it up and get what they want to eat, cause they locked up.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, let's see, about how many of the Yankee soldiers came then?

KEARNEY: It looked like to me at that time that there was about a dozen of them come through on the horses. It could have been more, but then that's what I seen, about a dozen of 'em together.

DR. CRAWFORD: And they'd stop at every place, I guess.

KEARNEY: Oh, every plantation, home it was they stopped there and have 'em open that smokehouse and carry them colored folks that food in there.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, let's see, what kind of food did they bring out?

KEARNEY: Well, flour, meat, meal, ham, shoulders, turkeys and squirrels and all kinds of food like that, they had 'em pitch it out on the ground. They hated to do it but they had it done.

DR. CRAWFORD: They had to do it.

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, what kinds of guns did they have, did you notice?

KEARNEY: The old what you call them old sticks, you take a ramrod and ah...

DR. CRAWFORD: Muzzle loading guns?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, it sounds like they were cavalry, soldiers, with horses.

KEARNEY: Yes sir. They was on horses all right.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did they stay and talk with you any?

KEARNEY: Oh, no sir. When they got all that food out and told you to get it, why they went on to another place. They was just travelling through. And if they didn't get it; when they come back, why they'd have to throw it out again.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did they come back several times?

KEARNEY: No sir. They didn't have to come through there but once to clean up.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yeah, was the war over then?

KEARNEY: Sir?

DR. CRAWFORD: Was the war over then?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes sir, it was over, they done declared peace then.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes. And you don't have any idea how old you were then, do you?

KEARNEY: No sir, I do not. But I know I was here in them times, cause I seen 'em.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes. Well, let's see, what did the soldiers look like?

KEARNEY: Looked like a white man, only had long hair, and red faces.

DR. CRAWFORD: Any of them have beards or mustaches?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. They had goatees and mustaches around their faces.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, was there an officer in charge of them?

KEARNEY: Say which?

DR. CRAWFORD: Was there an officer in charge of them?

KEARNEY: I didn't see that, I didn't know who it was--officer wouldn't be in there, just like a manager over the soldiers, I didn't know how he would be in that.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, what kind of horses were they riding?

KEARNEY: Well these here had red horses and kind of a Bay horse, and white faces.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes.

KEARNEY: Some of 'em was riding a black horse, why he was in the front. He was the main manager of it.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, I guess they went to Sardis, too, didn't they, in town?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes sir, he went one place and another; one plantation to another. All through there.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, they sure fixed things up.

KEARNEY: They did.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did they stay around long or did they just come through?

KEARNEY: No sir, they just come through. They finally did what they said, cause--they didn't then they come back, there'd be war again you know.

DR. CRAWFORD: So they just had to come through one time?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, just once.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, what did you think about all that when you saw them, were you surprised or afraid?

KEARNEY: I was just a child, you know, just a child like

he didn't know what was happening. Cause we didn't wear no pants, like these, like we got on now.

DR. CRAWFORD: Long pants.

KEARNEY: We didn't have nothing but a long shirt in them days.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was that what children wore?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: When did they get pants? When they got older?

KEARNEY: Well, sir, they got pants round, just around Christmas time to put on, but barefooted and long shirt was what you had on during them times.

DR. CRAWFORD: Now, that was true for boys, up till they got older, wasn't it?

KEARNEY: Till they got around 18 or 19 years old.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, did you have pants when you came to Memphis?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, we just begin to put 'em on. But I wasn't that age, but that's what they put on me. Cause I been wearing shirts all my life, up until then. But my dad after he came to Memphis--that was after everything was over with, why then he put pants on me.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, people dressed different then and they went barefoot most of the year, didn't they?

KEARNEY: All the year--after Christmas. It got cold. It wasn't cold--it wasn't cold to you cause you done got used to it.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, when you get into it gradually it doesn't bother you as much, I guess.

KEARNEY: No sir. Just old rusty foot out there on the ground, just like a ox.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, of course, people had tougher feet then because they were out the year around.

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: And that's something young people have trouble understanding now, I think.

KEARNEY: They sure do.

DR. CRAWFORD: What life was like. Did you eat pretty well on the plantation down there?

KEARNEY: Oh yes sir, yes sir, they fed me. Course on the plantation you got a certain amount of meal, a certain amount of meat and a certain amount of flour, but you get flour only once a week. Didn't care how much they had in that smokehouse, you just got enough to make two biscuits for you and me and the others. And that's all you got and if you eat that up that's all you got.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, did you get plenty of corn meal?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes sir, we got enough to last us a week. And if you run out, you had to do without till that time come to get some more.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, did they give you any meat?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, you got fatback. Plenty of it. To last you a week, now if you eat that up before the week was out, that was all you got.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did they give you coffee or sugar ever?

KEARNEY: No sir. If you got coffee, why--boss done made his coffee, ah you could get the ground

out and make your coffee.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, let's see, did you get any molasses?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, we got a plenty of them--sorgham--we had a plenty of them.

DR. CRAWFORD: What about beans?

KEARNEY: Beans, you had a certain amount of that to eat, it'd run you a week. And if it give out before that time--give it out till that time come again.

DR. CRAWFORD: People just had to make it last, huh?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. Had to make it last.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, did you eat better after you got to Memphis?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes sir. We would get our food like we wanted then, you know. After it's all over. And they declared peace. Them Yankees come through, then everybody commence eating what they want. But until then you got it just allowanced to you. Didn't care how much you had in that smokehouse, that's all you got. How many apples you had in that smokehouse, you didn't get but two apples, maybe two oranges for Christmas and a little piece or two of candy. That's what you got. You didn't get no more.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did everyone get that for Christmas, all the children?

KEARNEY: Every one on the plantation, that's what they got.

DR. CRAWFORD: Who gave it to them?

KEARNEY: Well, Master had 'em bring 'em up there to his house and give it to 'em.

DR. CRAWFORD: Master Whit Kearney?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: And all the children would go up to his house and they would go by and get that.

KEARNEY: Go there and get it. Say you was just passing by, just like I'm gonna come punch this clock, I come and punch it and you come right behind me and do the same thing. That's the way it was.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, about how many people were on the plantation, do you have any idea?

KEARNEY: No sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: I guess it was quite a few, wasn't it, several families?

KEARNEY: It sure was. Yes sir. It was plenty families. It was enough there. People had to you know raise up the childrens all there and they's all but--all seperate plantation, like they're lying here. This family childrens over there, now they had to go their master, the family children had to come to their master. You didn't go over there and go on with them children. You just go on that same side you's on. But don't you get over that fence unless you see Master. You had to see him, didn't you'd get a whipping.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, what about the older folks, did they go out and work in the fields during the day?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes sir, they had to work.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, well that was back during slavery then?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. They had to work.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, what did you do when they went off to work?

KEARNEY: I had to stay at the house and watch them

eagles, keep 'em away from getting them children. And when I went to the field, I had to carry some water out there maybe or carry them something to eat. That's all I did.

DR. CRAWFORD: What did you carry the water in?

KEARNEY: In a pail. One of these old tin buckets.

DR. CRAWFORD: About how many people would be working out in the field, maybe a dozen, or more or less?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes sir, more than a dozen, just a whole field of 'em.

DR. CRAWFORD: Now, you would carry water to them.

KEARNEY: Yes sir. Every hour or every other hour you had to be out there with some water. Meet them at the end when they get out there.

DR. CRAWFORD: I'll bet they appreciated that!

KEARNEY: Yes sir. I know they did cause some of 'em was glad to get it.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, what did you eat during the day when everyone was out picking cotton?

KEARNEY: Well, I'd have something to eat there in the house, corn cakes and such as greens, something like that, and milk and bread.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, when they got in from cotton picking at the end of the day, did people cook a supper?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, they cooked but nearabout had it done when they got there because you had them greens on and you had to like me I had to have it on, they had nothing to do but make up the bread and put it in the ashes down there and let it get brown and take it out and eat it.

DR. CRAWFORD: So you fixed the greens and put them on the...

KEARNEY: While they was out there in the field.

DR. CRAWFORD: Now, did they cook the cornbread in the ashes?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: What did they do, just sort of make it in cakes and put it in the ashes?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, put it down in the ashes. Cook biscuit bread the same way, but you wrapped it in paper.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, let's see, did you have a stove or a fireplace?

KEARNEY: Had a fireplace. Didn't have no stove back in them days. Just an old mud chimney and a fireplace kind of.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yeah, and you would put the greens in a pot on the fireplace, I guess?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. You had a, like two poles over here, one over there and one over here and a fork in it and you got another pole up here, run through eye, that handle of that pot, let it hang over there; cook 'em that way.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you keep a fire going all through the day?

KEARNEY: All through the day, but it would be a slow fire, you know, cook it slow so it wouldn't burn.

DR. CRAWFORD: Where did they cut the wood, did they do that the year round or was that mostly in the winter?

KEARNEY: That was mostly in the winter, you cut wood in the summer for the winter. Get it all piled up out there. Take fourteen cords of wood to carry you through the winter.

DR. CRAWFORD: That was a lot of wood when you had to chop it, you didn't have saws, did you?

KEARNEY: No sir, had ax, cut it with ax.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you ever get out and do any work in the field before you came to Memphis?

KEARNEY: No sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: You were still pretty young when you came weren't you?

KEARNEY: I was extremely young--I was young when I got to Memphis. Didn't have no food to you know cooking, doing nothing much and I was young, but a nurse. I was a nurse, I was houseboy. My mother was a cook.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well.

KEARNEY: She got there before she got their meals all ready to go before they come to the house. If she had any spare time, she'd go out there and pick a sack of cotton, maybe. Or chop a half a row of corn, cotton, something like that. But mostly her work was in the house and mostly my work war round the house--on account of watching them eagles. That was the most work I ever did until I got big enough to follow my dad around.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, that kept you busy.

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: What about the people that worked in the fields after the soldiers came through?

Did they go back to the fields and work?

DR. CRAWFORD: No sir. Cause they had all they wanted to do, right at home there, piddling around, cleaning up.

DR. CRAWFORD: What was the difference then--they were free after the soldiers came?

KEARNEY: Yes sir they was free then. They could do as they please, but some of 'em was just like peoples are now--some people are scared to drive automobile cause they're scared they'll wreck it.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, and they were afraid to be free.

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: So they stayed pretty close to the plantation a lot of them.

KEARNEY: Yes sir. Stayed on the plantation--wasn't no other place for 'em to go, but on that plantation.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, your father now came to Memphis.

KEARNEY: Yes sir, but that was after he was free and the soldiers come through.

DR. CRAWFORD: He stayed there a while after he was free didn't he?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, oh yes sir he stayed on.

DR. CRAWFORD: And worked on some crops for several years.

KEARNEY: Worked for old master for a long time. He had to drive him to his office every day.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did people talk a lot about being free after the soldiers came through?

KEARNEY: No sir, didn't do too much talk cause they was scared.

DR. CRAWFORD: But they knew it was a difference, huh?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes sir they knowed it was different all right. But they was scared on account of being slaves all their lives, you know.

DR. CRAWFORD: I guess it took a long time to get over that.

KEARNEY: It sure did.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well you were pretty young when that ended.

KEARNEY: I was at that time.

DR. CRAWFORD: But you still remember the soldiers come riding up?

KEARNEY: I remember that, cause I's there--when they take all that stuff out of the house that was worth anything and bury it.

DR. CRAWFORD: Oh, before the soldiers got there, huh?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. That was before they come in. And what they did why was--that food that was in that smokehouse they didn't give to colored and they had to throw it out there for 'em to get it.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did Old Master go away to war or did he stay at home?

KEARNEY: He stayed at home what time I knowed anything about.

DR. CRAWFORD: What kind of things did they take out and bury?

KEARNEY: Silver and gold.

KEARNEY: Yes sir. Money and other things too. For there wasn't no banks.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, do you know if they dug it all up later?

KEARNEY: I don't think so. I think a whole lot of it is in the ground somewhere now.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, they knew the Yankee troups were coming I guess.

KEARNEY: Oh, yes sir! They knowed they's coming but when they didn't know. So they just taken the stuff and buried it.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember what time of the year it was when the Yankee soldiers came, whether it was winter or summer or whether the crops were in or what.

KEARNEY: To tell the truth, it was in the fall of the year that I can remember when they come through but excusing that I don't know.

DR. CRAWFORD: And it was in the fall, do you remember the cotton was in the field then I guess when the soldiers came?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, some of it.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was some of it already picked?

KEARNEY: Sure.

DR. CRAWFORD: What happened to the rest of it--did they just leave it there?

KEARNEY: They had to leave it there. They had no other place to put it.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, after the soldiers came through, did the people who had been picking cotton want

to go back and do it?

KEARNEY: No sir. Long, long time ago!

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes sir, it was that. Well, I'm looking at a clipping here from the Press Scimitar written by Elton Roark and the date is Jan. 2, 1956, and it says that you were born on June 2, 1875.

KEARNEY: It was back in 1800, I know that.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, I don't believe--no it says Joe Kearney was born June 2, 1874 and he's still living. I don't believe that's right Mr. Kearney. I think you're older than that.

KEARNEY: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Because the fall the soldiers came through was maybe, in 1864 and you were living then.

KEARNEY: I was living then.

DR. CRAWFORD: Because you saw the Yankee soldiers then, didn't you?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, I seen them.

DR. CRAWFORD: You saw it with your own eyes.

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: And you're sure of that?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, I'm sure I seen 'em.

DR. CRAWFORD: Then you're older than they say you are Mr. Kearney. You really are.

KEARNEY: I shore seen 'em cause I's there when they come through and I know what they was doing. They had 'em throw that meat and stuff all out of the smokehouse and all that

stuff that was in the house they had to put it out. But they was scared because they knowed it was in there and they'd done give 'em orders to put it out for 'em to get that food. And they didn't do it so when they come through they had to put it out, why I know.

DR. CRAWFORD: Mr. Kearney, you know if that happened in 1864, and it seems to me like it did, you must have been at least 6 years old then.

KEARNEY: Yes sir, I was big enough to watch the--keep the eagles from carrying the children off.

DR. CRAWFORD: So, if that's true that's the year they came through, you were born some time in the 1850's.

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: And if you were born in the 1850's, well, you're close to 120 years old. Now, of course there's a lot we don't know about that--but that's the way it seems to me as a historian. And if that's true you know you lived through the Civil War.

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: And you were a slave then.

KEARNEY: We's come a long in slavery time. Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: And there are not many of you left who were.

KEARNEY: No sir, I know. I don't know how many are left but I know one thing. I know about them.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes sir! Well, I'm honored to get to talk with you Mr. Kearney because there are sure not many.

KEARNEY: Yeah.

DR. CRAWFORD: I'll try to find out when the soldiers went through down there at Sardis, but I'll bet it will be in the Fall of '64. I won't swear it was not '65, but I bet it was '64.

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: And if that's the case you're older than they think you are and it certainly is good to still be living this long but in good health!

KEARNEY: Yes sir, I'm in pretty good health.

DR. CRAWFORD: I believe you're in better health than a lot of people, maybe half your age, that I know about. I think you really are!

KEARNEY: Yes sir, I've been here a long time.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes sir, you have. You've seen a lot of Memphis and a lot of history.

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: And you're sure that it was in the fall when the soldiers came?

KEARNEY: Yes sir! I'm satisfied it was.

DR. CRAWFORD: Why do you think it was in the fall?

KEARNEY: Well, because I had to have on my old long shirt.

DR. CRAWFORD: Uh huh.

KEARNEY: And I didn't have no shoes on, but it was cold to me.

DR. CRAWFORD: Uh huh. And during the cold weather you wore the longer shirts, didn't you?

KEARNEY: Longer shirts. Yes sir, it come down to below your calf of your leg down near your ankle. That's what you wore.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, Mr. Kearney you've certainly had an interesting life and I'd like to talk with you some more about it and I'll come back and do it. I think your picture may be in the Memphis paper before long.

KEARNEY: Yes sir, yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: And we'll be sure you get a copy of it.

KEARNEY: Well, I hope you will send me a picture of me.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, we'll sure get one for you and I think we can get some for your family too.

KEARNEY: Yes sir, yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: Cause they would probably find it.

KEARNEY: They shore would.

DR. CRAWFORD: I'll tell you what I'd like to do would be to find out when your children were born if you get a chance to ask them. Is either of your sons or daughters here around the house?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. Aline?

DR. CRAWFORD: Who are you living with now, is this your daughter Aline?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: What's her name now?

KEARNEY: Aline Rodgers, now.

DR. CRAWFORD: About how old is she, do you know?

KEARNEY: She's in her 40's. I'll see if I can get her in.

DR. CRAWFORD: All right, sir. Mrs. Rodgers we were trying to figure out how old Mr. Kearney is and I was wondering for that if you knew when you were born.

MRS. RODGERS Well see, he is really my stepfather and I was born in 1919 and my brother was born in 1918.

DR. CRAWFORD: Uh huh. And Mr. Kearney married your mother then?

MRS. RODGERS: Yeah, we was round about 4 and 5 years old when my mother and him got married.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did he have any children who were born earlier Mrs. Rodgers?

MRS. RODGERS: Uh , my other sisters and brothers, they were born you know--we are the oldest, me and my brother.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, you know Mr. Kearney has had a real interesting life. He is one of the oldest people around and surely is healthy.

MRS. RODGERS: That's right.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you know that he lived during slavery and the Civil War?

MRS. RODGERS: Uh huh.

DR. CRAWFORD: You knew that?

MRS. RODGERS: I mean I knew he told me.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes he was alive when those things happened and you know he is not 106 years old if this is true, he's older than that.

MRS. RODGERS: Well that's what I, reason why I threw that paper in there because now this one here was made before we moved over here and we've been up here nearly seven years.

DR. CRAWFORD; Let's see now, this is an article from the Press Scimitar and I don't see a date on it. He's living with you Mrs. Rodgers--Aline Rodgers and you're his stepdaughter?

MRS. RODGERS: Yeah. Really I am but you know, I've been with him all my life practically.

DR. CRAWFORD: And this article says that he moved to Memphis when he was 14 years old and says here that he was born in 1870 on a plantation in Sardis, Mississippi and celebrated his 100th birthday this week, so this must have been in the paper about 1970.

MRS. RODGERS: Yeah, see what it is Daddy gets confused. You know, he told me I guess cause now he really can't think of some of the things that he said on there, you know back yonder when he was talking on that. Cause if he can, he can think better than I can.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, I'll tell you, Mr. Kearney has a fine memory--a better memory than a lot of younger people.

MRS. RODGERS: He's got a better one than mine cause he can think of things that I couldn't dare think of now.

DR. CRAWFORD: Mr. Kearney, God has really been good to you.

KEARNEY: Yes sir, mighty good, he kept me this far, so I believe he's gonna carry me further.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, I believe so. Here you are in better health than a lot of younger people.

MRS. RODGERS: What we's going by was his grandfather said that when him and grandmother got married they had been married 80, you know had been married, I think they said 80 years. That's what he said on there. No he said his oldest son was 80 years old. And that's how long they was married. Eighty years 'cause he said that his son was, he said on there somewhere, see right there.

DR. CRAWFORD: (This is a clipping)

MRS. RODGERS: The oldest son, Joe was born in June 2, 1874 and still alive and Uncle Ned was born in 1852.

DR. CRAWFORD: Now this is from the Press Scimitar and the date here is January 2, 1956, an article by Elton Roark and it is talking about Mr. Kearney's mother and father, Uncle Ned and Aunt Rosie Kearney have been married for over 80 years. And let's see, it says Uncle Ned was 103 on Christmas Day. These things often run in families, you know. It's sort of hereditary, a matter of living a long time. And they have been married 80 years by this time according to the paper here. Well, we can get a copy of this clipping. This was in 1956 and your father was still alive, wasn't he sir?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: Elton Roark says here, "When I drove out to the Kearney home I found Uncle Ned and Aunt Rosie sitting by the stove with members of the family in a little four room cottage. They are small and thin. Uncle Ned is bald on the top of his head, but has a gray fringe and whiskers. He still sits up very straight. Aunt Rosie is even thinner than he is, and she is all bent over." This was in 1856, I'm sorry, 1956 that Elton Roark came out and found your parents

still living. Now this is talking about them also. "Uncle Ned's age and background are well authenticated. The information was in his Bible, it was destroyed by fire some years ago, but Mrs. Bartz and Mrs. Charles E. Bruce have seen the record and remembered it. They testified for him when he applied for an old age pension. He was born December 25, 1852 in North Carolina. When he was a very small child he and his parents and a whole trainload of slaves were brought here by General Nathan Bedford Forrest (the one you see on the big horse up town). They were sold to Sid Harris, Grenada, Mississippi. When I was six years old, I was sold to Mr. Whit Kearney, near Batesville, Mississippi, Uncle Ned says. Mr. Kearney was good to his slaves and wouldn't let an overseer whip us. My name was changed from Ned Harris to Ned Kearney. He grew up as a houseboy in the Kearney home doing household chores. When the freedom war came on they sent me off to a Confederate camp near Grenada. I worked around the camp and they learned me to shoot and buckled a sword on me. After the war he was reunited with his parents and lived with them two years until he and Rosie were married in Sardis. They do not remember the date of their marriage but sine their son Joe is 81, they think they must have married about 82 years ago. Aunt Rosie doesn't know her age, it is thought she is in the late 90's. Nineteen children are born to them and three sons survive. Joe John and Scott. They estimate that there are about 60 grandchildren and great grandchildren."

That is very interesting, Mrs. Rodgers, thank you for letting me read this clipping of Elton Roark's from 1956. And I want to study a little more about Mr. Kearney's age, but it really seems to me on the basis of what he remembers about the Civil War, and the Federal Troops coming that he has to be more than 106 years old.

MRS. RODGERS: Cause he knows too far back.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes. That just seems that he really is. I think that that is really wonderful to be able to live that long. Mr. Kearney, I'd like to come back and talk with you more some day and I appreciate your taking time.

THIS IS THE ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE OF MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY. THIS PROJECT IS "THE JOE KEARNEY PROJECT." THE PLACE IS MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE. THE DATE IS FEBRUARY 12, 1976, AND THE INTERVIEW IS WITH JOE KEARNEY. THE INTERVIEW IS BY CHESTER MORGAN OF MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY AND IS TRANSCRIBED BY BARBARA WASSER.

MORGAN: O. K. Mr. Kearney, first I'd like to just find out when were you born and where?

KEARNEY: I was born in Sardis, Mississippi in 1800, around 1870, something like that, as near as I can come at it. And I was brought here to Memphis when I was around 13 years old, my Daddy did.

MORGAN: So you were born in Sardis...

KEARNEY: Sardis, Mississippi.

MORGAN: You don't know exactly when....

KEARNEY: No, no, I don't know exactly when because my Bible my mother had got burnt up, and that told me...I don't know just exactly when I was born.

MORGAN: But you think it was around 1870...

KEARNEY: Yes, sir, 1870.

MORGAN: What did your father do? (KEARNEY: My father?) Yes.

KEARNEY: He was in the army, and after he got out of the army, why, he was a hostler around the old master's house. He was a hostler. Kind of worked around the house like I do around the yard, shed, you see. From that, he come to Memphis.

MORGAN: You said he was in the army...

KEARNEY: Oh, yes, he fought in the Civil War, you know. He was Civil War. He was sold three times in slaves, you know.

MORGAN: How much do you remember your father talking about his life as a slave? Can you tell me anything that he told you?

KEARNEY: Yes, him and his wife--Yes, I can tell you something about it, cause in them times he would sit down and talk to me about how to do it, how to get along, and that's the way they raised us up under the old master's plantation, you know, raise us up, how to live to get along with folks.

MORGAN: What did he tell you?

KEARNEY: He told me, "Son, be careful and treat your friend or your neighbor as thyself." Just like if I want to treat myself right, treat you right."... and you'll have a long life." And I did have, so far. I remember that to be true. I treat you as I wish to be treated. Don't try to run nothing over you and you not run nothing over me. We be treating one another right.

MORGAN: Do you know where your father was born?

KEARNEY: In North Carolina.

MORGAN: He was born in North Carolina.

KEARNEY: That's what I understood him to say.

MORGAN: When did he come to Mississippi?

KEARNEY: He come to Mississippi, I don't know, along in slave. He followed the master there, you know.

MORGAN: You said he was sold three times?

KEARNEY: Three times in slave.

MORGAN: You said he was sold three times?

KEARNEY: Three times in slave.

MORGAN: Did he ever talk about what it was like?...to be sold... to have to move from one place to the other?

KEARNEY: No, sir, he never did tell me that.

MORGAN: Did he ever talk about his times in the war?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes, he talked about that, because he told me all about this freedom, when they declared peace, where they was and everything, showed me where he was.

MORGAN: Tell me about that.

KEARNEY: He said in slave times why they was fighting right in South Memphis, down the ravine there on the Mississippi river, when they declared peace. There was shouting then there when they said that. They enjoyed it, cause they knowed then that they was free. And from that they come back to Mississippi then.

MORGAN: Who did he serve under?

KEARNEY: He served under...I forget that...I can't think of the name that he served under now. Can't think of it.

MORGAN: Did he talk much about what he thought about being free?

KEARNEY: After he got free?

MORGAN: Yes, sir.

KEARNEY: Yes, he talked a whole lot about that because he said that...that's one thing I can't under-

stand there, because he had so much he had to do. At that time. Old master had him busy. I can't understand that part of it. I can't place it, because I can't think back that far. I can think alright, but I can't place what he said.

MORGAN: Who was his master when...just before the war? Who was the last white man who owned him?

KEARNEY: Whit Kearney.

MORGAN: Is that where your father got his name? Is that where your name comes from?

KEARNEY: Yes, sir. That name we got comes from Whit Kearney. See, that man is the one that he was sold to in that time, the last man he was sold to. Cause the first one was Harris, see, and the last man he's sold to, he went into his name. That was Kearney, cause we used to be a Harris before we become to be a Kearney.

MORGAN: Explain to me a little bit more about the kind of work your father did before he came to Memphis.

KEARNEY: Before he came to Memphis he was riding boss on the farm, the plantation.

MORGAN: Riding boss?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

MORGAN: Tell me what a riding boss did.

KEARNEY: Well, a riding boss is somebody come around and see whether you working, see how you getting along, see that you're doing so much work a day. Just like go out and pick 100 pounds of cotton and you say you want 200, why then, that's what I had to get, and that's what he see to you doing.

MORGAN: Now, did he work for his former master?

KEARNEY: Yes, sir, that's what he working for his old master then, his former master. And then he takes the old master to church around the house they're working, see to the stock getting fed and feeding the mules and all like that.

MORGAN: How many slaves did Mr. Kearney own before the war was over?

KEARNEY: How many?

MORGAN: How many lived on the plantation?

KEARNEY: Oh, I couldn't count that, because there was a lots of them. There was a whole great big plantation just lined with farmers, people was working slave.

MORGAN: What happened to them after the war, what did they all do after the war when they became free?

KEARNEY: Well, when they became free, why then they had to get out and get that food, what they could get after the Yankee come through and throwed it all out. Why, then they got that food and went on and they tried to make a crop then for whosomever they worked for--whosoever they could work for.

MORGAN: Did most of them stay with the master that they had...

KEARNEY: No sir. They'd done with that. No. No, sir, they didn't stay with them.

MORGAN: HOw would they get land, or would they rent?

KEARNEY: They rent or work sharecrop. Most of them work sharecrop, because they had nothing.

And then waht they raise, then they had to carry to old master and they would sell it for them.

MORGAN: Why did your father leave Sardis and move to Memphis?

KEARNEY: Just figured that out. I don't know, because I was about 13 years old when he left from down there.

MORGAN: So that would have been about 1883.

KEARNEY: Yes, sir.

MORGAN: How many children were in your family?

KEARNEY: Twenty-one. Umm. Twenty-one? I nursed them all. I was the oldest one in the family.

MORGAN: You are the oldest?

KEARNEY: Yes.

MORGAN: You nursed them all?

KEARNEY: I nursed all of them.

MORGAN: Tell me about that.

KEARNEY: All I know is I just had to see after them and keep the eagles from getting them.

MORGAN: Hmm. There was eagles in that time?

KEARNEY: Eagles, yes. Birds that catch the children and eat them up. So I had to watch and keep the birds from eating them up--from getting them. I had to watch the master's children a long time to keep the birds, the eagles, from getting them.

MORGAN: Hmm...How much of your time did that take up?

KEARNEY: Take all of it.

MORGAN: So that's all you did when you were a young boy.

KEARNEY: That's all I did when I was young was watch after the children. My Mother was the cook at the house, my Dad was the hostler, and so that throwed me to stay around the house all the time. I fared a little better than the slaves did out in the field.

MORGAN: Did you ever have time to yourself when you didn't have to watch after other children? How did you spend your free time?

KEARNEY: My free time? There wasn't much of them. Watching after them. I didn't have no free time.

MORGAN: You didn't have any time to...

KEARNEY: No, sir. I didn't have no time in them days from sun to sundown. That was my job. Only to shine his shoes. I had to shine the master's shoes every day, <u>every day</u>. They had brass toe and a brass heel and that had to look like gold when he walked out.

MORGAN: Did you get paid for doing that?

KEARNEY: No, sir, that's all I did. I did that to grow up in the family! I didn't get no pay. Slave... you don't get paid.

MORGAN: Well, now, this would have been, though, after the war, so, you say...

KEARNEY: After the war, why then we had nothing to do with that then. We didn't do it then. We had it all during the slavery time. I don't know anything about the war, I wasn't in that, but if I was born at that time, you know I didn't know until they declared peace. I don't know how long it was.

After the war, why I reckon it was about three or four years after the war before they declared...before the Yankees come through. When they come through, then it let you know you's free.

MORGAN: Well, you didn't know you were free until they came through.

KEARNEY: No sir, you just slave.

MORGAN: Well, do you remember being a slave yourself?

KEARNEY: I remembered the slave, but I can't remember saying just exactly what I was at that time, because I was too little then.

MORGAN: Oh, O.K.

KEARNEY: As far as the children is concerned, they didn't know. They just knowed they living, and that's about all, and working. But so far as my part, why, I was mostly handy around the house, houseboy; shining shoes, seeing that everything kept up around that house there.

MORGAN: You talking about the master's house?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, old master.

MORGAN: How did the black people that had been slaves get along with the master and other whites after the war, after the slaves were freed?

KEARNEY: They get on all right then. Yes, they fared fairly well then, cause all of them is glad they is freed and could get some food whenever they wanted it because see, during the slavery time, your food that you get, they issue it to you, so much a week, and when that is out, if you didn't have it, you didn't get it, until that time come again. The old meat they give you so much of that and if

it's gone, you just do without until you see it again. That's the way they did in slave.

MORGAN: Hmm. How did that change?

KEARNEY: Well, when the Yanks come through, they change that thing.

MORGAN: How did it work then? How did you get your food then?

KEARNEY: Well, you would go to the commissary and get it just like you would go to these groceries now and get it, but you'd get it more often in that time than you did then, because you was free you'd get your food just like you'd buy it now. But at the same time, at the slave time, they didn't give them but a certain amount and if that's gone you did not get no more, unless you got that and made it over, you was all right. You didn't get shoes like people did. You get shoes once a year and that was in Christmas time. You go barefooted. You ain't get regular clothes like we get nowadays, wore a long shirt in them days. You didn't have no control of yourself about slaves then. You just had to do like they said to do.

MORGAN: Well, now, when freedom came, all that would change.

KEARNEY: Oh, that would change, throwed it out, just like grass on a vine.

MORGAN: Then you were free to buy your own food and your own clothes whenever you could afford it?

KEARNEY: That's right.

MORGAN: Then your father went to work though, for the same man who had been his master.

KEARNEY: Yes sir. The same man.

MORGAN: How did he get paid? Do you remember how much he got paid?

KEARNEY: Well, I don't know about his pay, because I was really not understood, but they wasn't getting too much: thirty cents a day.

MORGAN: Thirty cents a day?

KEARNEY: Yes.

MORGAN: And how long would he work?

KEARNEY: Well, from sun to sun. From sunup to sundown. And I used to have to work that way, right here in this town. From sun to sun, and didn't get but thirty cents. All day long and a meal.

MORGAN: So your family could buy the things that were issued to them before

KEARNEY: Oh, yes.

MORGAN: Where would they go to buy these things?

KEARNEY: At the commissary.

MORGAN: Tell me about the commissary. Who ran it?

KEARNEY: You go to the commissary and get your food. Well, you got a book, just like these stamps you get now. There is so much in that book, you going in and use it until you use that book up, then you can't get no more, then you get that book again.

MORGAN: Who ran the commissary?

KEARNEY: Old master run it, but at the same time they was getting paid for it, they was getting paid for their food at that time.

MORGAN: Did the old master actually pay in money or did

he just pay in these kind of stamps?

KEARNEY: You paid in money for working by the day, but you didn't get no stamps until you got ready to get your food, then you got a commissary book. Then you go to the commissary and get what you want and they tear out the leaf.

MORGAN: After buying that commissary book, and buying everything there was that you needed to live, food and clothes, how much money was left over.

KEARNEY: Well, sometimes there wouldn't be any. Sometimes there would be a dollar left over, sometime not. But then you could get another book later on. See, that book lasted so long, then you go back and get you another.

MORGAN: How often was payday, do you know?

KEARNEY: Well, once a month. And if you made a crop, you'd get a settlement every fall, just like you do now. They'd pay you off. You'd get a settlement for what you got. During the fall, if anything was coming to you, you got it. If it was nothing but a dime, they'd give it to you. Except that, you didn't get it.

MORGAN: Hmm. Your father didn't actually farm then, immediately after the war, he worked for...

KEARNEY: No, he mostly see'd after the farm, he see to the mules being fed, see to them getting their food.

MORGAN: Even though you didn't farm and your father didn't, do you know enough about how that system works to tell me about it? What it was like to be a farmer?

KEARNEY: Well, it worked about like it do now in a way, but you always used mule and ox to farm with. You use ox when you got the real hard work, then you use mules when it comes

light and you get around one cotton crop.

MORGAN: Who would provide the mules and the equipment?

KEARNEY: Well, old master had all that stuff there, and all you had to do was go to the barn and get it. You work sharecrops, you know.

MORGAN: So he would provide the equipment. What about seed?

KEARNEY: Well, the seed was just piled up out there in the field and all you had to do was go get the seed and plant it.

MORGAN: So he provided all that?

KEARNEY: Yes, sir.

MORGAN: Then you worked and made the crop?

KEARNEY: That's right.

MORGAN: And how much of the money from the crop did he get?

KEARNEY: Well, he get paid for his food. Sometime he take all of it, sometime he leave you a little.

MORGAN: Well, how often was there some left over?

KEARNEY: Well, I couldn't say.

MORGAN: You wouldn't know, huh?

KEARNEY: No

MORGAN: Well, I may want to come back and talk about some of that later, but let's move on a little bit. You don't know why your father moved to Memphis, but it was about 1883.

KEARNEY: Yes sir. I don't know why he moved there, but then he come here.

MORGAN: What did he do after he got to Memphis?

MORGAN: What did he do after he got to Memphis?

KEARNEY: He commenced to working on the railroad. K. C. railroad.

MORGAN: Did the whole family move with him?

KEARNEY: He moved here, that's all I know, that he come to Memphis.

MORGAN: How many of you came to Memphis?

KEARNEY: Six of us, including myself. Just my father and mother, and six children at that time but the others were born here.

MORGAN: All the other children were born here?

KEARNEY: Yes.

MORGAN: Describe that move for me. How did you feel about moving and what was it like for a 13 year old?

KEARNEY: Well, I felt it was alright, because we had to move in a wagon. We had no other way of movin but in a wagon to bring us from there to here, because we had no other choice.

MORGAN: So you just piled everything you owned in a wagon and the family moved.

KEARNEY: Yes sir. Just like the Indians left here and the Irish left here whey they had to get what they could get and get on out.

MORGAN: What was Memphis like?

KEARNEY: Memphis was a small place here. I drove over Memphis when I come here in an hour and wouldn't have missed a turn. Knowed the owners--used to work for them.

MORGAN: What did you do when you got to Memphis, did you

work?

KEARNEY: I went to work after I got here. I went to work for Pappy Hadden. He was one of the old owners. He was one of the owners of Memphis.

MORGAN: What was the name?

KEARNEY: Pappy Hadden.

MORGAN: How do you spell the last name, do you know?

KEARNEY: No sir. I can't read. Pappy Hadden is all I know.

MORGAN: What kind of work did you do?

KEARNEY: I worked around the house, cut the yard and worked the flower beds for the first and after that I went to work around there making a little garden for him. From that I left there and went to the railroad, where my daddy was.

MORGAN: How old were you when you started to work for the railroad?

KEARNEY: When I started to work for the railroad, why I was about 18, 19 years old.

MORGAN: What kind of work did you do for the railroad?

KEARNEY: I toted water when I first started off. I had two buckets, had a yoke on it, put around my neck. Tote water up and down the railroad track.

MORGAN: And you'd work all day then?

KEARNEY: All day.

MORGAN: How much did you get paid?

KEARNEY: Well, I'd get 75 cents a day.

MORGAN: And six days?

KEARNEY: Six days a week.

MORGAN: What kind of work did your father do for the railroad?

KEARNEY: He worked on the track. He was tapping ties and toting rails and everything else on the railroad. But he getting $1.10 a day. See, we helped put that first bridge across.

MORGAN: You worked on that?

KEARNEY: Yes.

MORGAN: When was that?

KEARNEY: I can't say just exactly, but it's been a long time ago. That first Harahan Bridge put across there. I helped put it across, me and my daddy. It's been quite a while.

MORGAN: Where did you live in Memphis when you first moved here?

KEARNEY: Down there on Canebrick Avenue.

MORGAN: Tell me about the neighborhood. What did it look like and how many people lived around there?

KEARNEY: Pretty good neighborhood, but a small part of town, you know. There wasn't so many there. It was all mostly double tenements and shotgun houses, and all such as that. There wasn't no heavy, like it is now. There wasn't no sidewalks, nothing like that, no concrete, nothing like that. It was all mud row. It started out with blocks heading down the street, and left that to bricks.

MORGAN: Blocks?

KEARNEY: Yes.

MORGAN: What kind of blocks?

KEARNEY: Wooden blocks. Put them all down there for you to walk on keep from getting in the mud.

MORGAN: Yes, I've heard that mud would be so bad that animals would get bogged down.

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

MORGAN: Do you remember that kind of thing?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. I was right here when it did. I was here when they first put these streetcars, when they were bringing them here. They pulled them by mules. They used to drive them--drive mules to pull streetcars.

MORGAN: Do you remember when you saw your first automobile?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. The first one I seen I didn't know--I thought it was something or another--it wasn't made like it is now, you know. They was made different. I didn't think I'd ever ride in one of them, but I did. I seen pictures of them several times in the magazines, but I can't think just exactly--they were made up kind of like a buggy was made back then.

MORGAN: Do you remember about when it was that you saw the first one in Memphis?

KEARNEY: I don't know just the exact day, but it's a long time ago, a long time. The first one ever I seen where was I? Church, church, I know the name...

MORGAN: Well, let me ask you something else. You came here about 1883. Was there electricity available then?

KEARNEY: No sir.

MORGAN: How did you light...

KEARNEY: Coal oil.

MORGAN: So a coal oil lamp you used to light?

KEARNEY: Yes, a coal oil lamp.

MORGAN: What about heat?

KEARNEY: Well, we burned wood and coal at that time. Didn't have no electricity.

MORGAN: So you'd burn a wood stove?

KEARNEY: Wood stove, such as fireplace you know, wood and burn logs in it. Such as that was done in them days. Didn't have no electricity to go by.

MORGAN: Do you remember when you got electricity?

KEARNEY: Yes, but it's so long ago that I couldn't remember the year it was in, but it's been a long time. When it come out, I didn't believe it was going to do, but it did. I didn't believe I was going to ride in one of these airplanes but I got to ride in one.

MORGAN: You rode...what did you think about that?

KEARNEY: I just thought that was something that I wouldn't never have. A bird flying in the air and I'd be in it, but the Lord blessed me to see it. Me and my wife went to Chicago in one.

MORGAN: When was that?

KEARNEY: That was about four years ago. Went there and come back.

MORGAN: In that neighborhood where you lived, your father worked for the railroad. How did most other people make their living?

KEARNEY: Well, different jobs: around the house, in other words, they'd be farming the land around here. All this used to be farm land, you know. They farmed, make the crop

they worked at the oil mill. Several of them worked at the oil mill, you know, they had to run it and that take up a lot of men, to work the brick yard, mold bricks. And I used to be a regular fireman before that.

MORGAN: You did?

KEARNEY: I used to burn brick. I knowed how long it takes to burn and knowed when to set it to make it burn and knowed all of that. I remember when they had to make brick by hand. You know, take a board and put the mud in there and then scrape it all and mold them out that way. Now they got it so they make machines, make a thousand a day or more, in an hour, at least. And nowadays change that thing. Your hands used to be bloody all the time. Keep that sand, rubbing it on.

MORGAN: So you did that kind of work too?

KEARNEY: Yes.

MORGAN: How long did you do that?

KEARNEY: I did that for years.

MORGAN: Who did you work for?

KEARNEY: I worked for--I can't think of it. I know his name, but I can't call it to save my life.

MORGAN: Well, it was after that you worked on the railroad?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

MORGAN: How long did you work for the railroad?

KEARNEY: I worked for the railroad three years or more just toting water. Then I left there and went on the I. C. railroad and worked on it. I fired under Alloy on that road after I got grown. Him and George Barney used to be the main men on that road. I fired under him.

MORGAN: Were jobs hard to find back then?

KEARNEY: No sir, they wasn't hard to find. You could always find work to do, because everybody wanted somebody to do something. You'd get out of one place and go on to another and go on to work but it wasn't paying all that much you know. They didn't mind hiring you.

MORGAN: If you worked for 75 cents a day carrying water, how much did you make as a fireman?

KEARNEY: Well, I made sometime four dollars and a half sometime, six dollars a week. Somehow I saved you know. Didn't take it up. They ring you up 75 cents a day, why that's brought me up.

MORGAN: For the little time that you didn't spend working, like Saturday night, what was there to do in Memphis?

KEARNEY: Oh nothing, but go to bed--nothing but to get your rest. When you did get out, you'd be scared. Night come you had to go in here.

MORGAN: Why did you have to go in?

KEARNEY: Why, of course, they wouldn't allow no street walkers. They particular about that in them days. You had to get in at a certain hour. You go over that way, you liable anything to happen to you.

MORGAN: Like what?

KEARNEY: Like getting hurt, or getting killed or anything. They particular about you getting in. Them police'd get you.

MORGAN: Did many people get out anyway?

KEARNEY: Yes, they got out, but they got them in.

MORGAN: What would they do to them?

KEARNEY: Put them in the workhouse. You didn't stay out, no! They'd put you in the workhouse sure. The workhouse was out there at Crump's. Do you know where Crump Boulevard is? The workhouse was out there. They'd lock you up and carry you there as sure as the world.

MORGAN: Just for being out?

KEARNEY: Being out, loafing in the streets. You had to be in at a certain time of the night back in them days.

MORGAN: Well, you mentioned getting hurt. Who would hurt you?

KEARNEY: Well, you don't know who would do that.

MORGAN: Well, you're talking about crime. There would have been a lot of roughness.

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

MORGAN: I take it you never got sent to the workhouse.

KEARNEY: Never been arrested in my life. No sir. Never been in no trouble. Never been in a fight in my life.

MORGAN: There's something I forgot to mention. You didn't come to Memphis until the 1880's, but there was a yellow fever epidemic in the late 1870's. Do you remember anything about that?

KEARNEY: Yes, I've got a picture of it. I was there and all that.

MORGAN: You would have been in Sardis though, is that

right?

KEARNEY: Shucks, no sir. I was right here in Memphis in that.

MORGAN: During the yellow fever epidemic?

KEARNEY: The yellow fever--picking up the dead.

MORGAN: Can you describe what you remember about those days?

KEARNEY: I can remember when I was going around and picking up the dead. I can remember that and I can remember when they quieted down. I remember that. When they commenced quieting it down why they killed beef and hang it on the telephone poles then go back the next morning and get it and bury it--not bury it, but burn it up.

MORGAN: Beef?

KEARNEY: Beef.

MORGAN: Why would they do that?

KEARNEY: To catch that fever. That's the only way to quiet it down. Yes sir.

MORGAN: You said that you can remember going around and picking up the dead.

KEARNEY: Yes sir. They'd come by here today and all them sitting out on the porch laughing and talking, come right back in the morning, pick up all of them and carry them to Partridge field. I used to be on the dead wagon.

MORGAN: The dead wagon?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

MORGAN: Who organized that?

KEARNEY: I don't know. I don't know whether it was Pappy or who. It was organized and they died so fast they didn't have coffins for them. They'd have to carry them and dump them off in the dredge ditch.

MORGAN: Where was that?

KEARNEY: It was out here the Partridge Field, I think South Memphis. Just continued to dig all day and carry them and dump them in there next morning.

MORGAN: Now, were you working during all of this time?

KEARNEY: Yes, I was guaranteed. My health was guaranteed twenty-five years during the yellow fever.

MORGAN: Well, did work just stop? You had a regular job?

KEARNEY: I had a regular job, yes.

MORGAN: When the yellow fever hit, did you just stop working and begin to work on the...

KEARNEY: Oh, yes. When the yellow fever was done, why I went to work somewheres else. Whe it quiet down, but for so long. Cause they used to get ice out of the Mississippi River. I have cut that for years during the summer.

MORGAN: Cut ice out of the river.

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

MORGAN: How would you do that?

KEARNEY: You take a saw, cut it, bring it to--drug it over here to Memphis. Get you a skiff and get you a road cut across there so you can bring it, pull it here in the skiff put it in the ice house. The Mississippi River used to freeze over from one side to the other.

MORGAN: So you'd use that ice, huh?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

MORGAN: Where would you store it?

KEARNEY: Store it in the ice house.

MORGAN: Where? Tell me about the ice house.

KEARNEY: The ice house was built kind of like this house is and sawdust around about that thick. You pack that ice in ther and sawdust keep that ice all summer. In that ice house; you go there every day and get your ice out, but when it comes to getting low they stop you from getting it.

MORGAN: Who ran the ice house?

KEARNEY: Different ones, you know. They would organize to keep the ice in there. No certain person. For they'd pack it full in the wintertime and go back in the summer and get it. Ice was froze thick as this thing is tall, cut it with a saw, just like you do. Used to have these ice wagons, you know, go around and cut ice and haul ice around. Well, that's the way they did in the Mississippi River and put it in the ice house, packed it.

MORGAN: Then you wouldn't have your own ice, though. Did everybody cut...

KEARNEY: Everybody go there and get some ice. They sell it to them until it comes to getting low. Just as long as it last, see it getting near wintertime they do all right, but long through the summer you had to slow down on it.

MORGAN: How much would it cost to buy?

KEARNEY: Well, it cost, if you bought 100 pounds you'd pay 75 cents or a dollar for it.

MORGAN: When you brought it home, where would you keep it?

KEARNEY: Keept it in your house, wrapped up in a sack, rags around it.

MORGAN: How long would a hundred pounds of ice last in August?

KEARNEY: Well, it would last a good while if you keep it in a cold place. Ice don't melt fast if you wrap it up, so you get that rag cold or whatever you put around it, it'll stay cold, doesn't melt fast.

MORGAN: As both water carrier and fireman, how long did you work on the railroads overall?

KEARNEY: I worked on the railroad three years, I believe. Just about three years anyhow, toting water

MORGAN; And then what did you do?

KEARNEY: Well, I quit there and went to work in the brickyard.

MORGAN: I worked at the brickyard, four years or more. After I quit molding brick, I comes to burning brick. It takes fourteen days to do that, you know, then fourteen days to get it hot, then it is fourteen days to burn it, and I had that to do. But I got to be a pretty good burner, so that is my job, just burning brick. I didn't have to mold them no more. I did that three or four years.

MORGAN: Molding was always rough on your hands.

KEARNEY: Yes, it was rough on your hands. You wear your hands out, just bloody. Putting that mud in there and that sand and grit and stuff. You can't wear no gloves. If you were wearing gloves, you were picking them up loading the wagon or putting

them in the kiln, one.

MORGAN: How many people were working at the brickyard?

KEARNEY: Well, they would take as many as they could get--a dozen in the brickyard, molding, at that time.

MORGAN: How much money would you make, molding bricks?

KEARNEY: Well, about 75 cents a day.

MORGAN: Would you make more burning them?

KEARNEY: Burning them, you make more. Burning them, you wouldn't be molding.

MORGAN: How much would you make burning brick?

KEARNEY: Well, you'd make 30 or 40 dollars a kiln.

MORGAN: And that took 14 days, is it?

KEARNEY: Yes, 14 days to get it hot and then 14 days to burn it. That would be 30 some odd days.

MORGAN: And you'd make 30 dollars for that. That would come out to about a dollar a day.

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

MORGAN: What did you do after you worked for the brickyard?

KEARNEY: Well, after I quit working for the brickyard, I commenced to running about then, I was grown. I commenced to going around different parts of the world, wanting to see it. Hear people talking so much about the world, I wanted to see what's in it, so I commenced to be roaming then.

MORGAN: Where did you go first?

KEARNEY: I been Alabama, some parts of it. I've been south as far as New Orleans and Dallas. I been around in there, Houston and Galveston, been all around there. So I done a

whole lots of traveling in my younger days.

MORGAN: How many years did you spend traveling?

KEARNEY: I don't know just exactly, cause I just quit here about 20 or 30 years ago or more.

MORGAN: Then you came back to Memphis to settle down?

KEARNEY: Yes, something like that. Now, as far as florist's work, 28 years growing flowers.

MORGAN: Was that after you traveled?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. I worked for one man 28 years.

MORGAN: How old were you when you went to work for him?

KEARNEY: I couldn't exactly say, but I was grown, well grown.

MORGAN: You worked for a florist for 28 years?

KEARNEY: Yes. Johnson Florist. Worked for him for 28 years straight. I went to Houston and worked down there a year.

MORGAN: Let me ask you this. When you first came to Memphis before you did your traveling when you were working for the railroad and working for the brickyard, who were the black leaders in Memphis? The important black people?

KEARNEY: I knowed it...Jim Kinann and Bob Church.

MORGAN: Did you know Mr. Church.

KEARNEY: I knowed him.

MORGAN: What kind of a man was he?

KEARNEY: He was a good, fast, he was--Bob Church was a good boy, a good man, so far as I knowed of him.

MORGAN: Tell me what you know about him. What was he like?

KEARNEY: What was he like? Just believing in big times and oh, sport. Jim Kinann was another one. He believe in the big time and have a big sporting house, you know. Let me see, and another one, I know him--built up Beale street. I know the name, but I can't think of it now, but he was a great man for sports, you know, he was a big sporting man, colored.

MORGAN: What do you mean by...

KEARNEY: ...sporting houses and dancing and having a good time.

MORGAN: Tell me what you mean by that. Can you tell me some more about that? You mentioned dances...

KEARNEY: Yes, I mentioned that, because I used to go there, but I didn't never dance, but I used to go there to have a good time with them others that were dancing. Bob Church and them had these big sport houses and had all these dances and running on and going on down there on Beale Street. Another place I know they had it, too, out there, Hadenth Avenue.

MORGAN: When would they have dances?

KEARNEY: Well, every Saturday. Friday, Saturday nights, you know, that'd be when they'd get paid. Oh, they'd come in there, the rousters would come in from on these big boats, you know, the Jim Lee, the Robert E. Lee, different boats coming in and bringing all that money. They'd have a big time then, that's the way they got their money. Gambling houses and things. No sir, I never did gamble, but I was there in the midst of them, I might as well have been, because I seen them going on. I seen them have all that.

MORGAN: Describe that for me. Tell me about a Saturday night in Memphis.

KEARNEY: Well, Saturday night is kind of a big night for all colored peoples at that time. They'd always have a big dance, get these women around, you know, having a good time. But I never did, you know, just follow things. I'd just go there to see them go on, but I never did do it.

MORGAN: Tell me what you saw.

KEARNEY: I seen them dancing, cut up, have a time, and fight and do gambling. Raising a whole lot of cain. Some of them is quietly civilized and some of then ain't. Just like it is now. In some places you can go in and have a nice time and get out all right, then you go in to have a nice time and end up fighting and going on.

MORGAN: Did I hear you say there was gambling?

KEARNEY: Oh, there was gambling. Yes sir, there was gambling.

MORGAN: What kind of gambling?

KEARNEY: Shooting dice, playing the cards, drinking whiskey, chasing women and all that. But I always tried to be on the good side. I go in there and right out but I never did follow any of this-go down gambling and shooting dice and things like that. I never did do it.

MORGAN: Did most folks do that or...

KEARNEY: Yes, most of them did it. I knowed the man who put a fine on the gambling.

MORGAN: Who was that?

KEARNEY: Pappy Hadden.

MORGAN: Put a fine on gambling?

KEARNEY: Yes.

MORGAN: Did it stop it?

KEARNEY: No, it made it get worse, cause they're gambling today. No, he didn't stop them, but he sure fined them. It took them a whole week to do it, and you could catch them anywhere up and down the street at that time gambling. He stopped it. He ain't stopped it, but he put a fine on it. Eleven months, 29 days.

MORGAN: Then the city would try to stop the gambling, is that right? Is that what you're saying?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. The city wanted them to stop, cause they were getting too rough. They was killing one another like ... going on. They wanted them to quiet down, why putting a fine on them, they feel like that would help quiet them down, but it made them worse. You can get them nowadays; they'll do gambling right today.

MORGAN: I take it this was all black people you're talking about at these...

KEARNEY: Yes sir, black and some white.

MORGAN: There would be whites at these--yes sir, some whites was in it too. You know all black people ain't going to let you down and gamble without some white people in there gambling. They going to be in it, at least they was in it.

MORGAN: How many?

KEARNEY: I don't know how many.

MORGAN: I mean a lot, or a few, or...

KEARNEY: Oh yes sir, a bunch of gamblers out there. They can be white or black, they going to get together if they can get a gambling--if they started it, they going to do it, trying to win money. That's the way they did back in them days. Why, the roustabouts come in here on the boat, why they got paid off at that time.

And when they got paid off, why then they'd make right for some saloon or another and go to drinking and gambling. Men would be right there to try and get it, white and colored.

MORGAN: Let me move to another area. Were you interested in politics when you were a young man? When was the first time you voted?

KEARNEY: I've been voting ever since I've been big enough, to know what voting is. I vote for President and such as that. Try to get a President who would do what is right. If I believe he's going to do right, I'd vote for him and been voting for years.

MORGAN: Did you ever have any trouble voting?

KEARNEY: No sir, never have. They know I couldn't read, can't write, and there was always somebody to help me, give me a hand and show me how to do it and I would just go on in there and vote.

MORGAN: Who would help you?

KEARNEY: Well, peoples at the voting machine. They'd tell you what machine to go in and tell you how to do and if you do what you think, you go in them there machine, you go in there and work them trigger, why then the fool you think you getting, why go ahead and vote for him. Like you are running for the President now, his name is up there, well they couldn'd just go in there with you and show you, but they tell you just how to work that machine.

MORGAN: What about before there were machines?

KEARNEY: Well, we'd sign a strip they'd have, a voting strip.

MORGAN: A paper ballot?

KEARNEY: Yes, then we'd mark here. See, I put the X on there and that just stands on my..

MORGAN: Would you have somebody read the ballot to you?

KEARNEY: Yes, there would be somebody would do it, but I never did. I'd just always get my strip there and put an X on it, whatever I had, cause I couldn't read, you know. I ain't never been to school.

MORGAN: What kind of things were you interested in, in a politician doing? If you voted for somebody, for say, mayor, what would you want, why would you vote for one man or another?

KEARNEY: Why I just thought that man was--just like if you was running for office, and if I thought you'd do, I'd go in and vote for you.

MORGAN: Well, what would you want for me to do once I got in office or what would you look for out of a... Going in the office,

KEARNEY: I'd look for you to treat us right and handle the business right, be an honest man. If you're honest why you ain't going to do nothing but good straight honest work, that's the way I feel about it.

MORGAN: What did you think of Mr. Crump?

KEARNEY: Well, I always felt that Mr. Crump was all right. I tell you, I ain't found no fault in him. He always led us out like, it looked, pretty good. Ain't no man going to come up there and cut his whole head off for you, going to do the best he can without it. So that's the way I feel about him.

MORGAN: Do you remember the years of the first World

War? World War I?

KEARNEY: I can't remember the year, but I remember when that was.

MORGAN: Well, that's what I mean. Where were you?

KEARNEY: I was in New Augusta, Arkansas at that time, World War I.

MORGAN: What were you doing there?

KEARNEY: Farming.

MORGAN: Did it change things much when the war came?

KEARNEY: Yes, it made a great change, but they was awful tore up at that time. Every body was thinking the United States was going to get whipped, you see.

MORGAN: Is that right?

KEARNEY: Yes, well at one time they did say just lacking a hair, but that hair ain't never been broke yet! I can remember when it was. I was in New Augusta then. I talk to them now about it. I reckon if they'd been living they could tell you today it ain't done yet. They ain't whipped not one of the United States men, and they ain't going to do it fast.

MORGAN: But you weren't here in Memphis during the war years?

KEARNEY: No sir. World War I. I was in Augusta. I was out there farming, farming at that time. Course I was willing later, it happened but they didn't never call me. They wouldn't let me go in there, but I was ready and I told them what was going to be done about it, and it ain't done yet. Of course, people don't want to hear that, but that's the height of our lives today is prayers, praying is the cause of us right here today, in prayer, person be honest with you. So,

that's what they wanted, and they got it, and ain't bothered them yet. Ain't going to right fast.

MORGAN: Where were you during the 1920's? Were you here in Memphis?

KEARNEY: 1920's? I think I was in Alabama. Don't know exactly where I was now, it's hard for me to think about.

MORGAN: Do you remember when the Great Depression hit? Where were you then?

KEARNEY: I was here.

MORGAN: You were here in Memphis?

KEARNEY: Yes.

MORGAN: Describe those years for me, if you will. How tough was it, and in what ways was it hard?

KEARNEY: Well, sometime we get bread and had to go to the soup line and get it at that time. Go in and get what you wanted there and if you didn't get enough, why that was your fault. Cause you sure had to go there to get it.

MORGAN: Were you working when the Depression started?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

MORGAN: Where were you working?

KEARNEY: I was working at the florist's.

MORGAN: You didn't lose your job, then.

KEARNEY: No sir.

MORGAN: Did a lot of folks?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes. Yes sir.

MORGAN: You remember the soup line in Memphis?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes. I remember that. You had to go there to get something.

MORGAN: Where was the soup line in Memphis?

KEARNEY: It was out here on Madison, I believe. Down there on Madison, I'm not sure, I'm just believing about that. I just believe it is along Madison Street where they'd go to get their...to be sure, I can't say. I never did had to go to the soup line like people did because I always studied to save a little something and do, but I've known them to go there and get the food and sometimes they'd go there and couldn't get nothing hardly, cause it done give out, but so far as me getting something, I never did believe it. I always followed the work and try to scheme to have something. I do now.

MORGAN: Having a job helped a lot, I guess.

KEARNEY: Yes, that had a little something to do with it. It kept me always on the job, doing something for different people, and I never did have to go and my family never had to worry about nothing like that, but I'v known people who did it. Said they'd go there and some would get something and some didn't cause they didn't have it.

MORGAN: Who ran the soup lines? Who was in charge of it?

KEARNEY: I don't know just exactly, cause that is something I never did worry about, going to these places to get, I always try to study ways to take it from here and live on a little something and go ahead on.

MORGAN: Did a lot of your friends lose jobs in those days?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes sir, they lost jobs. That I know. I don't know too many of them to lose jobs, cause all of them has something to do. I can't remember that soup line too good, to be honest about it. It was back in the '20s that was, wasn't it?

MORGAN: 30s. Late '20's and early '30s.

KEARNEY: Yes.

MORGAN: Let's see if we can get this straight, now. You came to Memphis when you were about 13 and you worked until you were 21.

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

MORGAN: Then where did you go?

KEARNEY: I went to, when I was 21 years old, the first place I left and went to was Arkansas. I went out to Clarksdale and worked there and made two crops. I left there then and come back here and then I left here and went to New Augusta. I left New Augusta then and I come back here. I left here and I went to northern Alabama.

MORGAN: This is New Augusta, Arkansas?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

MORGAN: You were there for quite a few years, weren't you?

KEARNEY: I there 15 years.

MORGAN: Farming?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

MORGAN: And then to northern Alabama?

KEARNEY: Then I come back here, come New Augusta back here then went to northern Alabama.

MORGAN: What did you do in Alabama?

KEARNEY: I burnt brick, worked in an oil mine, worked in a coal mine, worked in a rock quarry and worked in a rolling mill, then I come back here.

MORGAN: And how many years were you in Alabama?

KEARNEY: I was in there three years and six months.

MORGAN: Then you came back to Memphis?

KEARNEY: Come back to Memphis.

MORGAN: And then somewhere in Texas, I think you told me.

KEARNEY: I went to Houston. I went there and I stayed there a little better than a year, or just about a year and I left there and come back here.

MORGAN: What kind of work were you doing in Houston?

KEARNEY: Growing flowers, florist's work.

MORGAN: And you worked for somebody else?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes, I was growing them for somebody else. Fellow by the name of Willie Holley. Of course, he's dead now.

MORGAN: You didn't stay in Houston very long

KEARNEY: I stayed in there about a year.

MORGAN: And then back to Memphis?

KEARNEY: Back to Memphis, and ain't been no further than that since I been back here. I went to Chicago.

MORGAN: You did florist work ever since you been back, is that right, florist work, gardening?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

MORGAN: How did you learn to do that?

KEARNEY: Well, I worked at the florist's man where they did know, you know, and they learned me.

MORGAN: Taught you how to...

KEARNEY: Yes sir, how to grow flowers. I fired the boiler down--don't know the name of the street, Johnson. I reckon you ought to know Johnson Greenhouse was on (shucks, how come I can't think?) Perkins Avenue down there near the railroad. Johnson Greenhouses. That had been for years ago.

MORGAN: You were working for a florist then?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. I was working...

MORGAN: You said you went to Chicago once. What was that for?

KEARNEY: I just went up there to see my son. He was up there.

MORGAN: How many children do you have?

KEARNEY: I got four.

MORGAN: Let's go back and cover that a little bit. I kind of left out something important. When did you get married?

KEARNEY: Oh, it's been about forty years ago, now, or more. My daughter, she's about 60 years old. It's been a long time. Forty years ago or more. I married this wife, but my first wife is dead.

MORGAN: Did you and your first wife have any children?

KEARNEY: No sir. Four with this one.

MORGAN: Then you've got four?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

MORGAN: And one of them is in Chicago.

KEARNEY: My son, yes sir.

MORGAN: So, you've done a lot of different kind of things. You've farmed, you worked in coal mines, rock quarry, you've done florist work, worked for the railroad.

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

MORGAN: I'd like to talk to you about each one of those things, if I could, sometime in the future, so...

KEARNEY: All right, then.

THIS IS THE ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE OF MEMPHIS STARE UNIVERSITY. THIS PROJECT IS "THE JOE KEARNEY PROJECT." THE PLACE IS MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE. THE DATE IS FEBRUARY 8, 1977, AND THE INTERVIEW IS WITH JOE KEARNEY. THE INTERVIEW IS BY DR. CHARLES W. CRAWFORD, DIRECTOR OF THE MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE AND PAUL VANCIL, REPORTER WITH THE MEMPHIS PRESS SCIMITAR AND IS TRANSCRIBED BY CAROL LANEY.

VANCIL: I've read a number of transcripts and I've heard the tapes that you've done before with Dr. Crawford and Mr. Morgan, but I wanted to go over some of the background of your family. You have four children, is that right?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

VANCIL: And are they all children or are some of them stepchildren?

KEARNEY: You mean, stepchildren by their father and I just married their mother, ain't that right?

VANCIL: Yeah.

KEARNEY: Well, I got two.

VANCIL: Two?

KEARNEY: Stepchildren.

VANCIL: Right.

KEARNEY: And then two of my own individual children.

VANCIL: I see. And going from the oldest to the youngest, what are their names?

KEARNEY: Well, one name is Aline Rodgers.

VANCIL: She's not the oldest is she?

KEARNEY: No sir. Willie is the oldest one. Willie, he is the oldest one he's my stepson. And Aline is the next oldest and coming down to Johnny, Alma is older than Johnny. I don't know exactly his age, but she's the oldest and he is the youngest one.

VANCIL: Johnny is the youngest?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

VANCIL: I see.

KEARNEY: And my individual child.

VANCIL: Do you know how old they are, each of them, exactly?

KEARNEY: I don't know just exactly, I can't tell, but Aline may can tell you, my daughter. She may can tell you just exactly her age, you know, over there, but I can't, cause I can't think back through there.

VANCIL: All your children, all four of them are still living, right?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, all four of 'em still living.

VANCIL: Where are they now, I mean, are they all in Memphis?

KEARNEY: Johnny's in Chicago and my daughter Alma, she stays over here on Spottswood.

DR. CRAWFORD: What is her last name, Mr. Kearney?

KEARNEY: Alma Kearney. She married, but I can't think of her name, she's Alma Kearney, that's given her name.

VANCIL: Aline, Mrs. Rodgers, stays here with you?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, yes sir, she stays here. She ain't been out of the house in almost--over a month in her life.

VANCIL: Really?

KEARNEY: She married, then she didn't get out.

VANCIL: Has she always lived here?

KEARNEY: Yeah, always lived here with us. Wherever we went, why she was there. She's the housekeeper now.

VANCIL: How long have you lived in this house?

KEARNEY: I've been here about six years now.

VANCIL: But you've lived in Memphis all your....

KEARNEY: I've been living in Memphis practically all my life. I was raised up here--about 14 years old.

VANCIL: Where is your son Willie?

KEARNEY: He's in town but he stays on, what street he stays on I don't know, but he's here close by.

VANCIL: And then after your children you had a number of grandchildren.

KEARNEY: Yes, there's a number of them.

VANCIL: Do you know how many?

KEARNEY: Twenty-five or thirty of them.

VANCIL: Really?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

VANCIL: And past that is great grandchildren.

KEARNEY: Great grandchildren and then my great-great grandchildren--I got four of them.

VANCIL: So there are, you, your children, grandchildren, great grandchildren, so you've got five generations.

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

VANCIL: Ah, do you know how many great grandchildren you have?

KEARNEY: Two, three--I've got four.

VANCIL: And then how many great-great grandchildren?

KEARNEY: I say, I got four great-great grandchildren.

VANCIL: Oh, you've got four, O.K. then how many.... Now, this is Kevin's great grandchild, isn't it?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. He's my great grandchild.

DR. CRAWFORD: And what about Elton, what is he, Mr. Kearney?

KEARNEY: He's my great grandchild.

VANCIL: Have you had any kind of picture taken with all the generations, do you think?

KEARNEY: No sir, not with them.

VANCIL: It would be interesting to see. You had a number of brothers and sisters, didn't you?

KEARNEY: I had twenty-one of us in all. I miss 'em all.

VANCIL: I'm sorry.

KEARNEY: I miss all of 'em--twenty-one in the family of us--they all been dead but two.

VANCIL: You were the oldest?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

VANCIL: And there's only two living besides you?

KEARNEY: Just me and him. Me and my brother.

VANCIL: Just two of you?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

VANCIL: Where is your brother?

KEARNEY: He stays down the street here. He owns this house.

VANCIL: Oh, really?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

VANCIL: Do you know how old he is?

KEARNEY: He's in his eighties.

VANCIL: Eighties. What's his name?

KEARNEY: Johnny Kearney.

VANCIL: One of your sons is named after him?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

VANCIL: I see. Well he's a good deal younger than you are.

KEARNEY: Oh, yes sir.

VANCIL: Was he one of the youngest of the family?

KEARNEY: No sir, he's not the youngest, the youngest one is dead.

VANCIL: Oh, really?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

VANCIL: But there were twenty-one children, you say?

KEARNEY: Twenty-one and I missed all of 'em.

VANCIL: You were the oldest, you say.

KEARNEY: I'm the oldest.

VANCIL: What was the next oldest?

KEARNEY: I was the next oldest.

VANCIL: What was there--a couple of years difference between you?

KEARNEY: About a year difference between us was all.

VANCIL: I see. You say she's dead now.

KEARNEY: She was the oldest, next to me, coming on up. But I couldn't think of all their names now because they done got from me. It seems funny though that all that passed you can't think of it, but it does, it can get away from you.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, as many things as have happened to you I can see how you could forget some, Mr. Kearney.

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you know if all your borthers and sisters were born in Mississippi or were some born after you came up here?

KEARNEY: Come up here, yes sir. Several of 'em--I think there was five or six of 'em born here--all the rest of 'em was in Mississippi.

VANCIL: When you came up here did all the family come together then?

KEARNEY: No sir. My daddy come before I did and then he sent back after my mother and me.

VANCIL: And the rest of your family?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

VANCIL: Do you remember how many of you came up to Memphis at that time?

KEARNEY: At that time it was four--five of us--at that time.

VANCIL: And all the rest were born after that?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, after they got six.

VANCIL: I see. That was just after the war ended, wasn't it?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes sir, that was after the war.

VANCIL: Not too long after though.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember how long your parents stayed at Whit Kearney's after the war?

KEARNEY: Well, I know one thing I was about thirteen or fourteen years old when we left the home place down there, come here.

VANCIL: Down in Mississippi?

KEARNEY: But how long it was in between here I couldn't tell but it was a lot of them years when I was down there, cause, I know I was fourteen years old, just about it when I come up here and I know we stayed there about--a pretty good while after that.

VANCIL: You were married in Memphis, weren't you?

KEARNEY: I was married in Augusta.

VANCIL: Augusta?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

VANCIL: That's in Arkansas, right?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

VANCIL: Do you remember how old you were at that time?

KEARNEY: No, I was just too old--I missed the World War I, during that time--it was going on and I missed the World War I. And I think they declared peace when I was there. I stayed there about thirteen years.

VANCIL: What were you doing there?

KEARNEY: Farming.

VANCIL: Farming? Cotton farming?

KEARNEY: Cotton and corn.

DR. CRAWFORD: You got married in Augusta, Mr. Kearney?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. Got married in Augusta, Arkansas.

DR. CRAWFORD: What was the name of the woman you married?

KEARNEY: Well, Lou Dunn was the constable there and he married us.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes.

VANCIL: And what was your wife's name?

KEARNEY: Wife's name was Susan.

VANCIL: Let's see, how long did she live, Mr. Kearney?

KEARNEY: My first wife, she's dead, she's been dead for years. Her name was Lilly.

DR. CRAWFORD: Your first wife, where did you marry her, Mr. Kearney?

KEARNEY: In Alabama.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember what town in Alabama?

KEARNEY: Russellville, but what county it was I don't know just exactly now.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember the name of the town?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, Russellville.

DR. CRAWFORD: Russellville.

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: Russellville, I know where that is. Do you remember who married you there or where it was?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, I married in a courthouse.

VANCIL: And her name was Lilly, you say?

KEARNEY: Lilly, yes sir.

VANCIL: That was your first wife?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember what her name was before she married you?

KEARNEY: No sir, I don't. She's been dead years.

VANCIL: You don't remember exactly when or even around when that was?

KEARNEY: No sir.

VANCIL: And then you say your second wife was named Susie?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

VANCIL: And you married her in Augusta.

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

VANCIL: And that was around World War I, sometime.

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

VANCIL: Now, was she the mother of Mrs. Rodgers?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

VANCIL: I see.

KEARNEY: And Willie, she was the mother of them.

VANCIL: And were they born before you married?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, yes sir. See, ah, her first husband was dead and I married her after he died.

VANCIL: I see. And Johnny and Alma were born.

KEARNEY: They's mine. They was born here.

VANCIL: From your first wife?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. Alma was born in Augusta and Johnny was born in Tennessee.

VANCIL: And where was Johnny born?

KEARNEY: Johnny was born in New Augusta, at least Alma was born in New Augusta and Johnny was born here in Tennessee.

VANCIL: In Memphis?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

VANCIL: I see.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you have any children when you were married to your first wife, Lilly?

KEARNEY: No sir, no sir, none at all.

VANCIL: Now, we've been looking at pictures of your parents.

KEARNEY: Sir?

VANCIL: We've been looking at pictures of your parents.

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

VANCIL: Your father was you say, I remember from the tape before, you say sold in slavery three times.

KEARNEY: He was.

VANCIL: You say once in North Carolina, you remember--did he tell you the places where he was sold?

KEARNEY: He was sold once in North Carolina--that was when he was sold to Whit Kearney in North Carolina cause he was in the United States then, but he was sold twice before he come to the United States. The first master he was sold to, I cant't think of his name, but I can think of the second one and the third one.

VANCIL: What was the second one?

KEARNEY: The second was ah....had it on my tongue just a while ago, I just thought about it--Harris. It was first to Harris--second to Harris.

VANCIL: And then to Kearney?

KEARNEY: Then to Kearney.

VANCIL: I see. And when you worked for Mr. Kearney, down in Mississippi, he....

KEARNEY: Kind of like a houseboy here working around the house all time. He was a what you might call a houseboy. Clean up and drive the master around and see the horses being fed, most of it was see to it feed being put out.

VANCIL: And your mother was a cook, wasn't she?

KEARNEY: Yeah, my mother was the cook there. Yes sir. And I was watching for the children.

I had to watch to keep the eagles from carrying them off. Wild varmints wouldn't have 'em. If I seen 'em I had to carry 'em in the house.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you see eagles then?

KEARNEY: Yes sir! Yes sir, I seen 'em carrying the children off, too. I've known 'em to shoot at 'em four or five times and didn't get 'em. And the children just hollering and screaming, going up, they had 'em in their claws, carry them to the old country, feed the young ones on 'em.

VANCIL: You actually saw that?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. My uncle shot at 'em, I know he tried to get 'em and didn't get 'em.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was he afraid he'd hit the children?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, but he wanted to get that eagle. He come down, why he got to try and all but he just missed by shooting at his head, you know. He didn't go far enough to hit him.

VANCIL: But never did?

KEARNEY: But it was some eagles in this country in them days.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you have a lot of hawks, too?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes sir, plenty of them! Plenty of hawks and buzzards, and cranes.

DR. CRAWFORD: How are the eagles different from the other birds? How do you know the eagles from them?

KEARNEY: Well, because when he'd stand up, he's taller than I'd be. He's taller than you, when he stand up--walk around just like some person on his feet.

DR. CRAWFORD: Down on the ground?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, on the ground, walking around. And when he sees a bunch of children, he'd ease up and get him one, why he'd just walk on up and swing around. But if you see him first, you'd run in the house. He'll raise up and go on off, but they got wings on 'em that stretch 'em out like that, you know. Kind of like an airplane. But they didn't have no luck here now, they's all gone back. The airplane will get them.

VANCIL: Not too many eagles around anymore.

KEARNEY: They ain't none I don't think, unless they got 'em in the zoo.

VANCIL: They've got some there. Do you remember how old your parents were when they died?

KEARNEY: My father was 111 and my mother was 108.

VANCIL: And they died just within several months of each?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes sir, yes sir. My mother didn't--she didn't even want to eat after he died. She wouldn't eat nothing. Just wanted to go on behind. I think it was about two months difference in their death of 'em.

DR. CRAWFORD: Where were they buried, Mr. Kearney?

KEARNEY: Ah, they's buried over here on Shady Grove--the old Philadelphia Burying Ground over here on Shady Grove. Just after you turn off of Mendenhall going east on Shady Grove there, a cemetary back up there where they're at. They got it--they keep it cleaned off now--have to, you know, on account of the city.

VANCIL: Do you ever go back to that cemetary?

KEARNEY: I go by there sometimes but I know about where it is.

VANCIL: Would you say that your family was a close family, that you stayed together an awful lot?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes sir, we's close. Close family of us.

VANCIL: Did you have a lot of family gatherings and that kind of thing?

KEARNEY: Oh, no sir. A lot of us was in Mississippi--I ain't never seen--of the Kearney's--I ain't never seen 'em. Then there's some that I have seen. And they don't be too far from me, but I just don't go down that way. I wouldn't know 'em if they didn't come in and make theirselves known to me.

VANCIL: Are you talking about people like your cousins and aunts and....

KEARNEY: My cousins and on my father's and mother's side.

VANCIL: When all the children--when your father and mother and then all the brothers and sisters were together in your immediate family--did you get together a lot and stay....

KEARNEY: Oh, yes sir. They'd get together a lot then and stay around one another. But after they passed and changing places why, I just don't know where they is. I'll be honest. I know one time they had a writeup in the paper that some of 'em owned a little town down there and I ain't never been there to see it. They had stores and everything run by the Kearney's, but I ain't never

been there.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was that in Panola County, close to where you live?

KEARNEY: Panola, close to Sardis?

DR. CRAWFORD: Uh huh.

KEARNEY: I don't know about Panola, I know Sardis and Batesville and ah--Grenada and all such as that, but if it is down in Panola, I don't about it, I never been there. But for staying there I left there, but I didn't go back after I got grown. I commence traveling the other way altogether.

DR. CRAWFORD: You always went ahead, didn't you? You never went back places you had lived--like Mississippi?

KEARNEY: No sir, no sir. I anin't never come back but only here, when I leave here and go I come back here, but all in Alabama and Arkansas and down in Louisiana down there around Texas--I never did go nowhere--just but come back home. I always wanted this to be my home and I just come back here.

DR. CRAWFORD: Mr. Kearney, if we wanted to go over to the cemetary to your parents' graves, how do you say we would go, would we turn off Mendenhall on some road?

KEARNEY: Yes, you turn off Mendenhall on--I think it's Shady Grove. Yeah, turn off on Shady Grove. Yeah, turn off on Shady Grove and go up a hill, you'll see a cemetary on the left hand side.

DR. CRAWFORD: Is there a church close to it?

KEARNEY: No sir, it was one but the church burned down and they moved it up there in White

Station.

DR. CRAWFORD: I believe I know where that church is on White Station. Is the cemetery close to Mendenhall?

KEARNEY: It's close to--I think it's the third street from Mendenhall, but it's right on the Shady Grove Road. Shady Grove is just below the church down there, but I think it's Shady Grove, I believe it is. I think on Shady Grove Road. See it's two over there and one goes out. Just after you leave the church down there I can't think of the name of that road there but anyhow that cemetery is on the Shady Grove Road.

DR. CRAWFORD: Are your parents graves marked, could we go there and read dates?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes sir, yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: Fine.

KEARNEY: They're on the side of the road, just as you get up in the cemetery, it's on the first grave, right on, right on the side of the road there.

VANCIL: The last time that you went there, did Mrs. Rodgers take you?

KEARNEY: No, she wasn't with us.

VANCIL: Well, how did you get there?

KEARNEY: I carried my brother, yeah, she was with us cause I buried my brother right beside of 'em, my younger brother. She was there.

VANCIL: Do you drive, Mr. Kearney?

KEARNEY: No sir, I ain't never drove a car.

VANCIL: Did you ever want to learn?

KEARNEY: No sir, I never did want to learn, I got too nervous and I wouldn't want to learn.

VANCIL: So when you....

KEARNEY: If I go, I have to go with somebody.

VANCIL: Or walk?

KEARNEY: Or walk. That's why I had to put my church work down. It's too far for me to walk there and I can't afford to pay nobody three or four dollars to carry me there.

VANCIL: You used to work for the church?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, I cleaned up for the church. I cleaned the church--janitor there for years. I just had to give it up.

DR. CRAWFORD: What church was that?

KEARNEY: New Philadelphia Baptist Church.

DR. CRAWFORD: Where is it located now, Mr. Kearney?

KEARNEY: It's right there on Mendenhall just below--do you know where the fire station is?

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes sir.

KEARNEY: Well, it's right across the street from the fire station, right there.

DR. CRAWFORD: It's just a little north of Poplar, isn't it?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

VANCIL: How long did you work over there, do you know?

KEARNEY: I've been working there about thirty-five years.

VANCIL: And how long has it been since you haven't

worked there? When did you stop working there?

KEARNEY: I just stopped this year. I've been working cleaning the church up for years now.

VANCIL: You also did some gardening over there didn't you?

KEARNEY: Sir?

VANCIL: You also did some gardening over there didn't you?

KEARNEY: No sir, I just had to clean up the church and cut the yard, that's all.

VANCIL: I see. Well, speaking of the jobs you've had, let's kind of go back and go place by place--where you worked and where you lived and after you left Mississippi, you came to Memphis.

KEARNEY: After I left Mississippi and come to Memphis I got a job working for Pappy Hadden and I was making thirty cents a day then.

VANCIL: What were you doing for him?

KEARNEY: Cleaning up and work around his house there. I have carried the money to the bank up--down Main Street. that was way back in them times. And the next job I got working at the Cooper Shop.

VANCIL: At the what shop?

KEARNEY: Cooper Shop, where they make barrels and kegs and stuff to put whiskey and beer in.

DR. CRAWFORD: That's something that a lot of people

have forgotten about. Where was the Cooper Shop?

KEARNEY: The Cooper Shop was down there on Front Street just before you get to the old jail house.

VANCIL: What else did you do while you were in Memphis--what other jobs?

KEARNEY: I hope my daddy plaster a whole lot. That was the next job I had.

VANCIL: You mean building houses and that kind of thing?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

VANCIL: And repairing houses?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. I worked at the brick yard--the Tennessee Brick Yard down there years and years--making brick when they was making it by hand. Had to make up the mud, then put it in there and take you a palate and cut it across and set it out there and let it dry out so you can put it in the kiln and burn 'em. I did that for a long time--years. Then I burned brick--I burned the brick for 'em. And I left Memphis then--worked on the Frisco Railroad--me and my daddy, when they was putting that first bridge across there. We worked on it for years. Then after I left that and come back and went to work on the downtown there why I was working for the flour mill down there, where they grind grain for flour. I don't know whether it was on McLemore or what but in South Memphis. I know it was South Memphis but what street it was on now I can't think. And after then why where did I go? No, I didn't do that then. I left the brick yard, after I left the flour mill and after I left working on the railroad, I went to Alabama and went to

working in a mine.

VANCIL: In Alabama?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. I worked in a rock quarry a while where they cut brick (rock), break it up and make lime.

VANCIL: Was this between the times that you worked in Memphis that you've just been telling us about?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

VANCIL: What job did you have before you went to Alabama and what job did you have when you came back to Memphis then?

KEARNEY: When I come back to Memphis I went to farming. When I left Alabama, I come back to Memphis, I farmed. I farmed around here for three or four years, cause I worked on the--me and my daddy farmed together one year there on the Mason place, that was a colored fellow right near Berclair. I worked with him and then I ran the place with another--rented a place there from Squire Helm. He was a squire in town and rented his farm--farmed on it. And moved from there to Jackson--no it wasn't the Jackson place. No, I moved to Cordova and worked a farm there at Cordova for Dr. Parrot.

VANCIL: Now, this is after you came back from Alabama.

KEARNEY: Yes sir, yes sir.

VANCIL: When you came back from Alabama, you worked a farm around here somewhere?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. Around, just around and around,

here in Tennessee.

VANCIL: And then you went down to you say, Cordova?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. Worked there. Worked a farm there for Dr. Parrot. He was a doctor and he run the farm out there. Workhouse taken that place up where I worked at. They had a workhouse out there for years. Now they done moved it--somewheres else. East of us, I don't know where they moved it to. And I have been there too but I don't know what place is it. I've been out there to visit the prisoners.

VANCIL: After you worked in Cordova, where did you go?

KEARNEY: I went to Arkansas.

VANCIL: And worked that cotton farm.

KEARNEY: Yes sir. Went out there and farmed under Fitzhugh-Snappen Company?

DR. CRAWFORD: You were there when you got married the second time, weren't you Mr. Kearney?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: And when World War I ended, when they declared peace--

KEARNEY: Yes sir, yes sir. I was out there then.

DR. CRAWFORD: In 1918.

KEARNEY: Yes sir. And then I left there and came back here.

VANCIL: Then, have you been here ever since?

KEARNEY: Been here ever since.

VANCIL: After you came back here from New Augusta,

what jobs did you hold?

KEARNEY: I went to work in the flower shop--florist work, you know.

VANCIL: What were you doing for them.

KEARNEY: I worked there twenty-eight years.

VANCIL: Do you remember what shop that was?

KEARNEY: Johnson's Greenhouse.

VANCIL: Where was that?

KEARNEY: It was on Madison--his office was--but it was over here on Perkins Avenue.

VANCIL: Where the greenhouse was?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

VANCIL: And you worked in the greenhouse?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. I worked in the greenhouse. I worked for him for twenty-eight years.

VANCIL: And then after you left there, you went to work for who?

KEARNEY: After I left Johnson's Greenhouse I went to Texas.

VANCIL: Texas?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. Grow flowers down there. Stayed there a year--come back home, been here ever since.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember about when that was, Mr. Kearney? Was that in the depression, maybe?

KEARNEY: It was right around the depression. Yes, sir! It was right in that part of town.

VANCIL: When you went to Texas, it was in the depression?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

VANCIL: Do you remember what part of town you were in there?

KEARNEY: I don't know what year it was, but I know where I was at. I was out there in Texas with another fellow that used to be here--Willie Hart. He carried, at least he hope me to get down there.

DR. CRAWFORD: What town was it, Mr. Kearney?

KEARNEY: Houston.

DR. CRAWFORD: Houston.

VANCIL: And you just stayed there a year or so?

KEARNEY: I just stayed there a year.

VANCIL: And came back here?

KEARNEY: And came back here and been here ever since.

VANCIL: And did you, let's see, after you came back here from Texas what did you do ?

KEARNEY: Well, I went to work, cutting yards and different things. See, I retired back in them times. I commence cutting yards and trimming hedges.

VANCIL: For various people? For people who owned houses?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, different ones.

VANCIL: And then, but then you worked at the church also.

KEARNEY: Yes sir, I worked at the church after I come back from Texas. I taken that job up down there and stayed and been there ever since.

VANCIL: I see. Did you work there every day at the church.

KEARNEY: No sir, I didn't work there only two days a week.

VANCIL: I see.

KEARNEY: The last part of the week.

VANCIL: Why was it that you went to Alabama?

KEARNEY: What was it? What year was it?

VANCIL: No, what made you go there?

KEARNEY: Just wanted to see the world! Wanted to travel. They's telling what was in it and I wanted to see it. And I thought that was a good way for me to see, just head out and go through the world and see it.

VANCIL: How did you get down there? Did you take a train or did you walk?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, I hoboed my way.

VANCIL: Oh, really?

KEARNEY: Tramp, yes sir.

VANCIL: How long did it take you to get where you wanted to go?

KEARNEY: Well, it take me about a day and a night ridin the rods.

VANCIL: That must have been an interesting way.

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

VANCIL: Do you remember any interesting experiences you had as a hobo?

KEARNEY: No, just go on out through the woods and when I get there, why when I got to where I wanted to go, I just tramp around there in different places. Hunted and worked--I worked in an ore mine two or three years.

VANCIL: In an oil mine, you say?

KEARNEY: Ore mine. Cutting ore. You didn't have to mix these razor blades, steel rails and...

DR. CRAWFORD: That was done close to Birmingham, I guess?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. Out around Birmingham and Cherokee and Montgomery, all in there.

How long did you stay in Alabama?

KEARNEY: I stayed in there about four years.

VANCIL: Is your wanting to see the world, is that the reason you went to see Texas?

KEARNEY: Yes sir that's why, I wanted to see the world. I wanted to see it as much as I could, but be a tramp and, without paying my way. And see how I could get through the world. See I've been in places that taken me all day just to get from one house to the other. Sometimes it would be way in the night when I'd get where I'd see a light at. Just traveling by myself.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was that way out in the woods?

KEARNEY: In the woods, on the road, you know, those country roads through the woods. See a light here, well I'd, just like going up and down this street, I'd take out to that light. And I traveled by the bark on the trees. See on the north side of the tree the bark is thick; on the south side of the tree the bark is thin. Well I always, when I wanted to go, I'd just go out there to the tree and look at it, where the moss grow on that side, where the bark's thick at. On the other side, why--on the south side, why, it don't it ain't thick. And no moss ain't growing on it. But where the moss grow, that's the north of it, after checking tree. That's the way I traveled.

DR. CRAWFORD: What would happen when you would get to a house, Mr. Kearney?

KEARNEY: I'd go up there and get me something to eat, cut wood and get my food and water, one step and another.

DR. CRAWFORD: Were the people always good to you--friendly?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. Never been in nothing that wasn't friendly. Everybody would take up for me. And in all of my life, I never been arrested. They taught me that in my young days that if I be obedient to my fellow man, I'd get through the world and they'd appreciate me and they'd honor me. Well, I did it and I witnessed that I ain't never been arrested in my life.

VANCIL: Who was it that told you that?

KEARNEY: My parents.

VANCIL: Your parents said that to you?

KEARNEY: My parents and old master and Mr. ?

says you are a law abiding citizen if you don't get arrested and have nothing to do with any trouble and they can't find my name on the books anywhere.

VANCIL: What job that you had did you enjoy most? What did you like doing the best?

KEARNEY: Well, I liked firing the best, burning brick, burning lime.

VANCIL: Why did you like that?

KEARNEY: Well, because you didn't have to do nothing but go down and check it and keep it fired up--put that wood in there, burn it.

VANCIL: Did you enjoy your florist work, at all?

KEARNEY: Sir?

VANCIL: Did you enjoy working for the florist?

KEARNEY: Yes, I enjoyed working there because I didn't have a thing to do but potting them flowers, plant them seed. See, I had it good there. And I quit and went to firing and I fired at night down there for twenty-eight years, excusing the potting I'd do.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was that after you came back from Arkansas, that twenty-eight year job?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: So that started maybe close to 1920.

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: That probably lasted, maybe 'till about in the 40's or so?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. And I think I done fine though, I didn't have to worry about my trips.

The best people that I ever traveled with is a Scotch-Irish.

DR. CRAWFORD: Why did you like them, Mr. Kearney?

KEARNEY: Because they take up for you. They'd fight for you and they'd see that you get a plenty to eat, plenty to drink and nothing didn't go bad with them; didn't look like to me at all. But it looked like they got all the Irishmen out. They can't find them now like they used to. T'aint none now I don't guesss, I guess they went back to the old country.

DR. CRAWFORD: Were you a real young man then?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, I was young. I was a youngster.

DR. CRAWFORD: How did you get to be friends with them?

KEARNEY: Well, they was traveling and I was traveling, hoboing, you know. They wouldn't ride on a--pay your way for nothing, they'd have a sack of money and wouldn't spend it. They's close with their money. They stop and eat here, get 'em enought to carry 'em far as they wanted to go and stop again, why then they'd get food there. We learned to cut the wood, clean up a little something around the house and pile a pile of wood for 'em and they'd give us enough to last two or three days, maybe a week. We eat on that.

DR. CRAWFORD: Would you take a sack of food with you when you left?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. Took biscuits and corn cakes and go about our business.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you usually travel with people or alone?

KEARNEY: Sometime I was with somebody, more or

less but I always been by myself. I didn't worry about nobody to go with me because when I's traveling through the woods I'd be by myself and I hit the railroad I'd get with the others and then travel, but the Scotch-Irish is the best natured people that ever I traveled with.

DR. CRAWFORD: Where did you sleep when you were traveling Mr. Kearney?

KEARNEY: I'd have--rake up a bunch of leaves out there and sleep on the ground. You didn't have no certain place.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you not travel in the winter?

KEARNEY: In the winter time, why we'd rake up a big pile of leaves and back ourselves up under it and get us some water and food and stay there until a warm day came. Them leaves keep you sweating under there--had snow on it.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you go to black people's houses and white people too?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. Any of 'em.

DR. CRAWFORD: And they all treated you well?

KEARNEY: All treated me well. And places where they didn't have no colored persons, why then we'd have to catch a freight train and go through there.

DR. CRAWFORD: Were there many places like that?

KEARNEY: No sir, cause you'd go out east. But down South, round out west, I hadn't run up on many places out there. But out east, why you had to be very careful.

DR. CRAWFORD: Where was east, Mr. Kearney?

KEARNEY: It was around in the other side of Alabama back in the mountain up there. You had to be particular how you traveled, then you have to stay on the railroad.

VANCIL: What would happen if--

KEARNEY: Well, if you got off, they'd kill you.

DR. CRAWFORD: That was kind of in the mountains, wasn't it?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, it was in the mountains.

VANCIL: So, what did you do to protect yourself?

KEARNEY: Well, I could go on a train then through there.

VANCIL: You stayed on the trains, you mean?

KEARNEY: Sir?

VANCIL: You stayed on the trains?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, I stayed on the boxcar fastened up. You better not stick your head out.

VANCIL: Was there ever a time when you came close to--

KEARNEY: Came close to it?

VANCIL: Yeah.

KEARNEY: Yeah, I've been where I couldn't get off the railroad and had to stay on the tracks-- if you step off the railroad, they'd kill you. Stay on the track.

DR. CRAWFORD: Were there a lot of people riding the train then?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes sir, a lot of 'em--a lot of

hoboes then cause there was a rod in there for you to ride on.

DR. CRAWFORD: You'd just ride the rods then.

KEARNEY: I'd ride the rods sometime, then I'd get in the boxcar.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did the railroad police ever give you any trouble?

KEARNEY: No sir. Never did. Cause I'd always look like stood in with 'em, some way or another. The Lord just let me go through there and wherever they was, they'd tell me what to do and I'd do it and I'd go on. They say, get in that boxcar and shut the door and fasten it when you in this place, and when you get there, why you get out and get in another one.

DR. CRAWFORD: When you were friendly and ask people what to do, they'd usually help you then?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes sir. Something to eat or you got where you didn't have it why they'd give it to you. They did me. Course I wouldn't go back over them roads now cause I wouldn't make it.

VANCIL: You, say that the Scotch-Irish were some of the best people that you ever traveled with?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, they're the best-natured people--see.

VANCIL: You said they'd fight for you.

KEARNEY: Yes sir, they'd fight for you.

VANCIL: Did you ever have any experiences where

there were--fights that you were involved in?

KEARNEY: I ain't never been in a fight, but wherever they was if anybody spoke rough to me--don't bother him, they called me Black Reed--"don't bother Black Reed". Yeah, "don't bother him".

VANCIL: What did they call you?

KEARNEY: Sir?

VANCIL: What did they call you?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, they'd--

DR. CRAWFORD: They called you Black Reed?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, they called me Black Reed then. "But, don't bother Black Reed."

VANCIL: They called you Reed because you were so thin?

KEARNEY: No sir, that's because they just called me that. They was good people though.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you travel very long with the same bunch of people?

KEARNEY: No, sometimes I'd be together two days, three and then again we'd get away from one another--just different ways.

DR. CRAWFORD: Would you run into them again later.

KEARNEY: Oh, yes sir, I'd run into 'em later. Scotch-Irish, you know, got black hair and, man, they good. I'll never see them no more but I know one thing, they was good to me. Then I'd run upon a race like you are--Southern people--they awful good to me, they ain't never mistreated me in my life,

they'd always take up for me.

VANCIL: Did you have any particular Scotch-Irish friends that you remember--just some individuals?

KEARNEY: I can remember one called Bankdown--they called him Banks, but he was a Scotch-Irish and his brother killed a man and he was over him. And he had him to working in the pen just for killing that man. And he was the overseer over them, if it was raining or sunning and I just thought he's just doing wrong, but he knowed the law. He was the law. He made that man work out there in that storm and raining like it was--just on account of killing that man. He didn't punish just one man--he punish you just like he'd punish me or anybody else, for killing anybody. And he was the man that done the punishing.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you say his name was Bankson?

KEARNEY: Bankdown. His brother's name Walter and his name was Bankdown. He got killed. This fellow had it in for him and shot him at the station there in Russellville.

DR. CRAWFORD: Shot him in Russellville?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was that when you were living in Russellville and you were married to your first wife?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. And that's where he got killed at. Bankdown, he was a fine man, but he was law you know, just like these prisoners that get out and they've got a

law over him and make him work.

DR. CRAWFORD: And that's what Bankdown did?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. He was over his borther and his brother working in there--rock quarry, bustin rocks, you know for--put a load on--he's out there, made him work. The rest of 'em was gone out of the rain. I felt bad for him, but he got killed.

VANCIL: Let's go up to nowadays and, what's a typical day for you, Mr. Kearney, what do you do?

KEARNEY: What do I do now?

VANCIL: Uh huh.

KEARNEY: I don't do nothing, now but sit down and look and think about the days that's passed.

DR. CRAWFORD: What time in the morning do you get up to start with, Mr. Kearney?

KEARNEY: I get up around six or seven o'clock. I get up early sometimes, then I get up round about eight, no later.

DR. CRAWFORD: When did you learn to get up early, back when you were young?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, I'd get up before day when I's young because I had to get up. Master and them said get out of bed and be up and look outdoors before sunrise, you had to get up.

DR. CRAWFORD: What do you have for breakfast?

KEARNEY: Well, back in them days, didn't have

nothing but corn cakes and fatback.

DR. CRAWFORD: What do you have now?

KEARNEY: And milk. But now I eat poached egg or slice of bacon, cup of coffee--my biggest eat now. I get me a cup of coffee, I can go then. But I just sure got to have that.

DR. CRAWFORD: I kind of feel that way too.

KEARNEY: Yes. Sure got to have my coffee. But except that I ain't one to--night, I can get it in to eat my dinner, supper--give me greens, peas.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, do you get out and walk around any in the days now?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes sir, I go around. It's so cold now I can't do no walking, but when it gets warm I get out there and work in my garden. I just ain't doing nothing on account of it's cold outdoors.

VANCIL: Where is your garden--in back?

KEARNEY: In back, yes sir.

VANCIL: What kind of things do you grow?

KEARNEY: Grow turnip greens, okra, collards, such as that.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you do any other work around the house or the yard?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes sir, I cut my yard, trim the hedges, least I been doing it, I hope I'll continue.

DR. CRAWFORD: I'll bet you will.

KEARNEY: Yes sir. See, just wintertime now that

I ain't out, cause I don't want to get out there and take cold, you know. I ain't never been sick in my life to have a doctor and don't know what it is to take nothing but an aspirin or piece of bandroll once in a while, something like that, but otherwise I ain't never had a doctor come to me only when I was operated on.

VANCIL: When you cut your lawn, when you mow your lawn, what kind of lawn mower do you use?

KEARNEY: A push mower.

VANCIL: You have a push mower that you....

KEARNEY: Yes sir. It's run by gas but I has to, you know, guide it along. I cut the church yard all last year and then cut yards out here. I ain't gonna do that no more, I'm getting too stove up in my legs, I can't handle it like I want to.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, you may not be as stove up as you think, Mr. Kearney, when spring gets here.

KEARNEY: Yeah, I hope not.

VANCIL: What other kind of work around the house do you do?

KEARNEY: I can, I can clean this floor and wash dishes and anything in the house here to be done I can do it. Cook. I'm a pretty good cook, too.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you do some work every day?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, I do a little something every day.

VANCIL: What kind of entertainment do you have nowadays, do you watch TV or....

KEARNEY: I watch it most all time when I'm around home here.

VANCIL: What kind of shows do you like on television?

KEARNEY: Well, any of 'em do me--I'm not just have no certain show, but any of them.

DR. CRAWFORD: How is your eyesight?

KEARNEY: I see pretty good.

VANCIL: Do you wear glasses at all?

KEARNEY: Sir?

VANCIL: Do you wear glasses?

KEARNEY: I ain't never wore none.

DR. CRAWFORD: And you hear all right.

KEARNEY: I hear pretty good, but understanding. I can hear you talking good, but understanding what you say, unless you speak it loud why I can't understand it good.

DR. CRAWFORD: And you've never worn glasses and you're still able to watch television and get around.

KEARNEY: Yes sir, yes sir.

VANCIL: When you go out in the town, do you go with Mrs. Rodgers?

KEARNEY: I go with her or some of the children.

VANCIL: And where do you go, where do they take you?

KEARNEY: The biggest I's going is to church. I don't go around town to no places like that.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you go to the stores or anything?

KEARNEY: No, I don't go to the store. I don't even cross the highway because they notified me when I was getting up in age always be with the light and I go across that highway I'm going over to the barber shop to get a haircut or something. But except that I don't go across there unless I'm compelled to.

DR. CRAWFORD: About how far do you walk when you go out, do you go many blocks?

KEARNEY: I go round here and go down to the meat house, then turn and come back here, go down to the corner round, turn and come back, why I think I've done pretty good then. Course now when the weather fairs up, I follow that lawn mower, I do a whole lot of....

VANCIL: Looks to me like you've kept yourself in pretty good shape, Mr. Kearney. Kept getting your exercise.

KEARNEY: Yes sir, I've done pretty good. Course that ain't my business now that's the good Lord's goodness for me to see cause I looked in the fireplace and in the boilers and things many times and my arthritis and no glasses, its a wonder I could see.

DR. CRAWFORD: Have you ever had any accidents, have you ever been hurt or had any broken bones?

KEARNEY: No sir. I ain't had no broken bones at all.

DR. CRAWFORD: You've either been careful or lucky.

VANCIL: Or both.

KEARNEY: Yes sir. I ain't never had none.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember, Mr. Kearney, when you saw your first car? I know you lived back in the time when there was....

KEARNEY: Yes sir, when the first car come in, when I first seen, I was here. They brought 'em in here in these what you call, you had to get out there and....

DR. CRAWFORD: With a crank?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember who had it or what color it was?

KEARNEY: Who was that?

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember when you rode in your first car?

KEARNEY: The first car I ride in my brother--let me see here, I believe he's driving what they call--with a crank.

DR. CRAWFORD: Where you had to start it with a crank.

KEARNEY: Yes sir. I forget the name of them cars though. I declare I can think of it but I can't call it.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, do you remember even back before, before that Mr. Kearney, when you saw your first train? Was there a railroad in Sardis when you lived there?

KEARNEY: They put the railroad in there during the time that I was there, but the first train that I seen was when they fired the wood. You know, to get wood

they had to cut the wood and put it on the side of the railroad down there for 'em to pick it up. That's when the first train I seen was.

DR. CRAWFORD: And they burned wood in it?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes sir, it's stoker. Burn wood then, cause I fired on the IC road and they burned wood in it. Mr. Alloid, he was the engineer.

DR. CRAWFORD: Who was?

KEARNEY: Alloid.

DR. CRAWFORD: Alloid?

KEARNEY: Alloid. He's the engineer and needed a fireman to keep the steam up, you know and he setting with that throttle in his hand to carry us fast or slow.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember when they built the railroad now at Sardis or was that built when you were born?

KEARNEY: That was built, I believe after I was born because they used to bring, haul freight to groceries from here to Sardis on a wagon, four mules hooked to it, could bring cotton from Sardis to Memphis on a wagon. See, that's transferring the stuff, different freight and they had to wait until that wagon come in when the groceries give out to bring the flour and meal down there. That's been a long time since. Then the railroad commence bringing it in there on the boxcar, seeing they had the mules used to pull the boxcar around after they got there just like switching, carrying cars around here now, you see. The mule had to pull it around and give it a start so it could throw that switch and put it in the way they wanted it to load up and do such.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, to go a little further then, do

you remember when you saw your first airplane?

KEARNEY: The first airplane I was here, I believe. The first airplane I've seen it was here and I didn't know what it was. I thought it was a bird or something in the air flying around. And the first train--that I can remember, Alloid, George Barnett and them was in it and they's talking about Jesse James used to hold that train up during them times, I know him. He was on a horse.

VANCIL: That was out in Missouri, wasn't it?

KEARNEY: Sir?

VANCIL: That was out in Missouri, wasn't it?

KEARNEY: Jesse James came through Sardis, too, cause I seen him.

VANCIL: Oh, really?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: He's supposed to have come down here. What did he look like?

KEARNEY: He looked like another man that's all I can say with coal black hair. But he had long beards and he was good looking fellow though.

VANCIL: Did he look mean?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, but he could use a gun.

VANCIL: When you saw him what was he doing?

KEARNEY: Sir?

VANCIL: When you saw him what was he doing?

KEARNEY: He was riding a horse when I saw him.

VANCIL: How did you know it was him?

KEARNEY: Well, because they said it was him, by different ones, you know, called him by Jesse James. And he just liable to be going to hold up a train anything. He did it all by hisself.

VANCIL: He wasn't with a gang of people?

KEARNEY: No sir, he wasn't with a gang.

VANCIL: By himself?

KEARNEY: By himself. They said when he went into a barber shop--I seen him they said when he went in a barber shop to get a shave--he go in there by himself, he didn't carry nobody to protect him. He'd lay down his gun and tell them to go ahead and shave him. Wasn't nobody gonna bother him. He had one in one hand and one in the other. When he got in town, they'd close the stores.

VANCIL: This was--now you say this was down in Mississippi, where you saw him.

KEARNEY: Yes sir. Years ago.

VANCIL: I was reading and listening to the tapes that you've done before and you mentioned when you were working for Whit Kearney that--and you were watching children.

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

VANCIL: That you would take your meals in the house.

KEARNEY: Yes sir, I did. I carried 'em in the house and I'd eat around the house because see, I was treated a little better by my mother being the cook and I was around the house all the time, I was treated a little better too on the plantation. Children on the plantation they had to eat there

with a wooden spoon out of a trough. They had to pour the milk in there and let it run down that trough on it, like you'd feed a hog.

DR. CRAWFORD: Now, where was this, was this in the house, that they fed them like that?

KEARNEY: This was out there in the yard where they put the food in there for them to come up there and eat. They'd line up there on each side of that thing till they'd all get to where they couldn't get in there and now and then they's set on the end and wait till that one get done and then the other one would come up there and eat.

DR. CRAWFORD: About how many children were there at that time?

KEARNEY: I don't know, there was--

DR. CRAWFORD: Lots of them?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, whole lot of them. At that time.

DR. CRAWFORD: Who would feed them, who would put that in the trough?

KEARNEY: The older women, see like women that get too old to get out in the field an work manual labor, why they the ones that would look after the children and feed them, cook for 'em. See.

DR. CRAWFORD: And what would they put in the trough for them besides milk?

KEARNEY: Nothing but milk and cornbread.

DR. CRAWFORD: Milk and cornbread huh?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. You was allowed so much and you just had so much to eat and no more until

Sunday and then you was allowed two biscuits.

VANCIL: But you--you were fed differently though, weren't you?

KEARNEY: Oh yes sir, I--

VANCIL: You ate inside the house?

KEARNEY: I ate around the house there.

VANCIL: When you ate, where were you, I mean, did--

KEARNEY: Sometime I'd be under the table where they'd be eating their meals, they'd hand me something down under the table there.

VANCIL: Oh, really?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

VANCIL: You sat under the table then?

KEARNEY: I was, you might say, a house cat.

DR. CRAWFORD: And when you slipped under the table, they'd put--they'd give you something--

KEARNEY: They'd give me mine down there under the table.

VANCIL: Is that the way you usually ate?

KEARNEY: I'd usually eat that way when I was up there at the house.

VANCIL: What about your parents, where did they eat?

KEARNEY: Well, they eat there at the kitchen.

VANCIL: In where your mother worked.

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

VANCIL: I see.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did your mother teach you anything about cooking?

KEARNEY: Me? I learned how to cook now, yes sir. I can cook pretty good now.

DR. CRAWFORD: What do you like to cook most now?

KEARNEY: Anything they can put on there except--cake, I don't like to fool with cake too much now because I can't handle it, keep my mind on what I'm doing. But excusing that I can cook any kind of meat you want or any kind of bread you want.

VANCIL: Do you cook a lot of the meals here?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. I fix breakfast sometimes. Used to all time when my daughter was working.

VANCIL: Do you remember when you were down in Mississippi working for Mr. Whit Kearney and you heard the war was going on--what did they tell you about the war?

KEARNEY: They's telling me all about what they's doing and where they's fighting at. When they get ready to declare peace, why, everybody was shouting then for was gonna get freedom.

VANCIL: Were you happy about that?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, they was happy and I was too.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you know about how old you were then, Mr. Kearney?

KEARNEY: No sir, not just exactly, I wouldn't just exactly say.

DR. CRAWFORD: How old would you guess you were?

KEARNEY: I guess to myself I was thirteen or fourteen years old, cause after then they brought us here to Memphis.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was it right after the war that you came here?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. After the war, my daddy came here and brought us here to Memphis.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did he stay and make a few crops in Mississippi before he came here?

KEARNEY: I don't remember him making no crops down there, but I remember him hauling cotton and things from the mill--from the house to Memphis. But, see, they gin cotton down there back in them days by mule power and ox and then pack it with their foot. And you know, you had to jump in and jump out when you packing it with your feet--in order to keep that thing from coming down there and mashing you up in it.

DR. CRAWFORD: They'd dump more cotton in on top of it?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. Just ginning all the time, just dropping it in there, but at the same time you got to pack it when that pressure come down just like you have something to come down on that--when it comes down, why then you've got to get in there and get out, so it'll press that cotton on down below that.

VANCIL: Where were you when the soldiers came through the plantations?

KEARNEY: When the Yankees came through I was at old Master's house.

VANCIL: You were in the house?

KEARNEY: I's at his house, cause see, before they come, before they come through about a month or two or two or three months beforehand, they's gathering up all their silver and their gold, money they had and was burying it, cause the Yankees would be coming through. They buried a many a dollar and it's a many a dollar in the ground today that they'll never use--never get.

DR. CRAWFORD: Who buried it--did Whit Kearney go out alone and do that?

KEARNEY: No sir, he had his servants to do it. But he showed 'em where to put it.

DR. CRAWFORD: He must have trusted them--

KEARNEY: And then he--sir?

DR. CRAWFORD: He must have trusted them to have them do that.

KEARNEY: Oh, yes sir. He had to. He's gettin it out of that house because when they come they's gonna throw everything out, when the Yankees come through. And when they did come through, they throwed everything out doors--all their fruit and all their food they had in the smokehouse, locked up--birds and quails, rabbit, all that was locked up in that--ham--all that was locked up in that smokehouse--wild turkeys, wild geese--all that was locked up in that smokehouse, but they just scattered it out on the ground--flour by the barrel and told 'em told 'em to come and get it.

VANCIL: And what did the servants do?

KEARNEY: Lot of 'em did it and lot of 'em was scared to get it.

VANCIL: What did you do?

KEARNEY: Me, I was right there with old Master and I was just gettin all I could to eat of it, I didn't have to worry about it. But them others didn't get it.

VANCIL: So you didn't run when they--

KEARNEY: No sir, I didn't have to run. But he told us, I think it was two or three weeks before that, before they got there. But when they come through they cleaned up with everything, they see to it was done.

VANCIL: When you think about the Yankees coming through and you watching them from the house as they came through, how do you picture that, what do you see when you think back about that?

KEARNEY: Well, I tell you, it's a good feeling and it's a bad feeling cause you don't know how you're gonna do till it's all over. It's a good feeling to see 'em comming say you're free, you can go anywhere, but before then you couldn't go anywhere unless you slipped off and if they caught you they'd whip you. See.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember what they looked like when you saw them coming, Mr. Kearney?

KEARNEY: They looked like a bunch of--people in front of a hearse, you know, just marching, just about two dozen mens or more, just in a row coming on horses. And they was coming full force to them places, go house to house and do that. But they was all in a line together, they just--they--deep just like you'd have a car here and a car there--one just right like that. Then when that row come through there was another one right behind it

going through.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, had you seen any Confederate soldiers before that?

KEARNEY: No sir. I didn't see 'em before then.

VANCIL: You said--you said you felt good and bad when you saw them coming....

KEARNEY: Well, I tell you the bad feeling was that I felt like they'd turn and come back and beat you up for picking up that stuff after they done kept it in there so long.

VANCIL: You were afraid the soldiers would come back?

KEARNEY: No sir. Not the soldiers but the owners of that would do something, but they didn't do it.

VANCIL: What did happen? What did they say to you?

KEARNEY: They didn't say anything but to get it.

VANCIL: The owners said that?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. After they's gone they'd tell you to pick it up. That was yours then, cause if they hadn't, why it would have been something behind it.

DR. CRAWFORD: You mean the soldiers might have come back?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, they would have come back, cause they said they would.

VANCIL: What did the servants say, were they shouting and--

KEARNEY: Oh, yes sir, they was joyous, a lot of

'em and a lot of 'em wasn't. Rejoicing that they got their food and didn't have to work for Old Master to allowance it out to 'em, cause they'd give you so much to last you a week and if that run out that was all of it. You'd have to wait until that week come in again you'd get some more. You had to do without or get some of your neighbors divide with you.

VANCIL: What did your parents tell you about how to act when the soldiers came, did they say anything to you about that?

KEARNEY: No they didn't tell me nothing but just said they was coming through and they knowed they was gonna open that smokehouse up and they had to get all that silver and stuff out of the house so when they throwed everything out, they was gonna throw it out. But they had all their money and everything taken out of the house. Then they come through, they went through the house and there wasn't nothing in there for them to throw out.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did they take any guns or anything?

KEARNEY: Oh, no sir, they didn't take no guns. They didn't from there, I don't know what they did in other places. I know they didn't take none there. For it's one thing they did, they put that food out, cause they had some in them smokehouses. Cause you wasn't allowed to eat nothing but fatback, two biscuits around and if you eat that up that's all of it.

DR. CRAWFORD: Because people had corn meal, didn't they?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, but they'd issue that to you and they'd give you so much to last you a week and if that run out, you just out till that week time come again.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did people run out much?

KEARNEY: Some of 'em did, some of 'em overeat theirselves I guess and eat up what they had. They had to do without until ration time come again, Monday morning, or Saturday evening.

VANCIL: How did you feel about being free?

KEARNEY: I felt all right, but I'm telling you the truth, I was doing fine. I was glad for the other fellow. And that's a good feeling when you get--say you are a free man and can walk and do like you want to do. But when you are tied down you've had it. Why? Because you can't go where you want to go and you can't talk like you want to talk. Now I couldn't talk, if I was a slave, like I'm talking now. When I talked to my peoples I had to get down beside of a big pot there and talk. See, talk out so they could hear me. But except that I could whisper and whisper and do all I want around the house, just whispering to you. But you talk up, talk out, you'd get a whipping for it.

DR. CRAWFORD: What do you mean, talk out, do people--

KEARNEY: Talk loud enough for somebody to hear you.

DR. CRAWFORD: Oh. Did that happen to children usually, they get whipped for that?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes sir. Young children like that boy there, now he wouldn't get no whipping cause he didn't know no better, but when you got up over that why you had to kind of be careful what you said, particular about it. A grown person, he sure had to be careful.

VANCIL: Were there, were there some servants who were afraid to be free, who were scared to--

KEARNEY: Say was there some that were scared? Sure a lot of 'em was scared to be free because they hadn't never been free, been slaves all their lives. And when they said free they didn't believe it, lot of 'em didn't believe it. But when they commenced to getting that food and everything made a change that brought 'em in there and they knowed then they's free. They's some people that they'd almost take a whipping to get down there and pick up something that was throwed out down there. Why? Because they'd been taught that all their lives.

VANCIL: Did your father and mother work for Whit Kearney after the war or did they leave immediately?

KEARNEY: Well, I reckon about a month or two, but then they didn't do too much work around there then because Whit Kearney himself had to leave.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you know where he went?

KEARNEY: No sir, I do not.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you know why he had to leave?

KEARNEY: No sir, I do not that, but I know he left the there. And he got his jewelry and stuff and got out.

VANCIL: How did you feel about Whit Kearney, did you like him or did you dislike him.

KEARNEY Well, for my part, he treated me all right cause I's a housecat. And as long as you around the house and done what he said, done what they said you

didn't get no whippings and rough treatment. But them out there in the field had to get up and get out there by sunup, 4 o'clock of the morning you're up eating your breakfast, be out there in the field before the sunup. When the sun rises you be out there standing with your hoe ready to do your--with a sack of seed on your back, go along sew along, somebody come along and pull the dirt up on top of it. That's miserable.

DR. CRAWFORD: Just as soon as the sun came up, they had to start?

KEARNEY: You start with the sun and leave at the sun. When the sun go down you leave that field. The sun rises you be in the field.

DR. CRAWFORD: Now, did they stop in the middle of the day to eat?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, they had their food out there under a shade tree, yeah, and set down and eat.

DR. CRAWFORD: How would that food be fixed? Would they cook it or would they have it already?

KEARNEY: Well, the older people that was too old to go to the field, that was their job see to that food being done and knitting and patching, fixing your clothes. That was their job, see to it being ready. When that time come all they had to do was come there and eat.

DR. CRAWFORD: So they'd bring food out to the field?

KEARNEY: Sometime they would, but most of the time they'd go to the shade to, where I mean, to the house and get it. Well, it was almost like being in the field because it was an old log cabin and you had a ground floor, you know

how it, it kivered with mud, you ever seen them?

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes sir.

KEARNEY: House kivered with mud and bushes and things all laying up on top of it and then slope it to the side and put shade grass and mud all in there and smooth it down so when it rained water run off on the side like it run off these houses now on the ground.

DR. CRAWFORD: Now, that was not a log cabin, was it, that was just brush and mud.

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: No, I've never been in one.

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: No, I've never been in one.

KEARNEY: Well, they had 'em in them days. They had a log cabin, then a log house. There was cabins built out of logs all around up where there was kivered with sawdust and brush. Not sawdust, but mud and sagegrass and brush. Put that sagegrass in there and then put little mud and then they put another layer--that's the way the houses, most of the houses covered with that and built, chimneys built out of mud and sage.

DR. CRAWFORD: What was Whit Kearney's house made out of?

KEARNEY: Logs.

DR. CRAWFORD: How big was it, do you remember?

KEARNEY: Oh, it had twelve or thirteen rooms in it.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did it have a porch?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, it had a porch to it. Cut them logs and kealed 'em up and line 'em down,

wooden pegs in 'em.

DR. CRAWFORD: What kind of fireplace did Whit Kearney have?

KEARNEY: He had a fireplace that had a four foot, you could put a four foot log in there--great big fireplace and then you put you a backlog in there and it was large enough for that front log come out there and pile a little wood in between it and make it burn good. He had a regular fireplace.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did he have a rock or mud fireplace.

KEARNEY: Mud. Built out of logs and mud--sagegrass brush, little sticks, one sticking this way and they put in there like that, and then they mudded, put that sagegrass in there, till you get to the top of the chimney.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did they have any stoves at the plantation?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes sir, the master had a stove, but a cooking stove. They had that.

DR. CRAWFORD: But they didn't use it to heat with?

KEARNEY: No sir, hadn't used no heat. That was done in a fireplace with wood. In my time, I don't know what they had before then.

DR. CRAWFORD: And your mother was the cook?

KEARNEY: Mother was the cook for Whit Kearney, yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did she cook anything special for you ever, did she slip you anything that she cooked?

KEARNEY: No sir, she'd just cook it and put it there, they'd feed us. She'd cook for

them and I ate like they did, but the others didn't do that. I won't say they did, because they didn't do it. They had a rougher treatment than I did.

DR. CRAWFORD: When you didn't slip under the table to eat, where did you eat?

KEARNEY: I'd eat in the kitchen.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you have a table in there or something?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes sir, they had a table in there. Me and my daddy eat around there in the kitchen. But excusing that all the rest of that stuff was on the outside. Hand to you down there on the doorstep.

DR. CRAWFORD: What did you like most when you were growing up, what was your food you liked most?

KEARNEY: I liked, ah, I had to like corn cakes, had to like that cause that's the main food.

VANCIL: Didn't have much choice on that, huh?

KEARNEY: No sir, I didn't have no choice. But excusing that I like a biscuit and them there oatmeal and they had what they called pap, I liked that.

VANCIL: Pap?

KEARNEY: Pap. Made out of milk and flour and something like that. It was thick like this here eagle brand milk in the can, you know, it was thick like that. They'd put that out there and you'd get it and some oatmeal on it or rice and you could go to town.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did they have sugar then?

KEARNEY: They had sugar, but it was brown sugar. You got to see the white sugar, that was for Sunday, mostly have for Sunday, you know.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did they have coffee then?

KEARNEY: Coffee, yes sir they had plenty coffee, but it was old Arbuckle coffee. You had to grind it and parch it you know. It was green, you had to parch it, that was still coffee. Parch it and I had that job when I wasn't shinning shoes around the house or looking after them children, that was my job--grind coffee so they'd have coffee plenty wouldn't have to worry about it.

VANCIL: Were you always busy?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes sir, now I was busy I had work to do.

VANCIL: Did you ever get any time to play with ah--

KEARNEY: I'd get time but it would be late. Sunday evening I'd get out and go across and play a little.

VANCIL: What would you do when you played?

KEARNEY: Oh, run and jump, climb trees, ride bushes down.

DR. CRAWFORD: I'll bet there are a lot of people Kevin's age here, who've never ridden a bush down.

KEARNEY: Oh Lord, yes sir.

VANCIL: I don't even know what that is.

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: Would you tell us how you did it then, Mr. Kearney?

KEARNEY: How--

VANCIL: How do you ride a bush down?

KEARNEY: Well, climb up on it and get up in the top of it and bend it over and jump down. Yes sir. Yes sir. Just ride up and down on it. Yes sir. Get on them old limbs there and get me one bent down and you could have a good time swinging around, hit the ground here and over yonder, come right back here and hit it again.

DR. CRAWFORD: What kind of toys, did any of the children have any toys then?

KEARNEY: They have a few, old master's children had toys but the other children didn't have so many toys.

DR. CRAWFORD: What kind did they have?

KEARNEY: Well, they'd have little dolls and such thing as French harp and juice harp. They'd have all that to play music, you know. They'd be glad to get it. Cause I's glad to get one when I's little.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, did people usually work Saturday evenings or did the field workers get off?

KEARNEY: No sir, they worked till night. Now if you did something bad and didn't do to suit him he'd make you work all day. But as long as you did something just the ordinary work, you'd get off Saturday at noon, do your own work.

DR. CRAWFORD: What would the people from the fields do then Saturday afternoon?

KEARNEY: Well, clean up the house, comb their head, wash their clothes and get ready for church

that morning.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did any of them go to town, could they do that?

KEARNEY: They could go to town all right, but they had no money to spend, but they'd go down there and get with them that was spending it-and talk and laugh. Sometime they'd go or something and get their children a piece of candy or apple or something or another, Mr. Marsa be around there give you a little something to give 'em. But that's all you got.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did people do anything to celebrate on Saturday nights?

KEARNEY: Well, they did but it wasn't nothing all that much to it cause they'd get out there in them busarbors and have their Saturday night playing till it got dark and then night you going in.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did people get to drink any whiskey or anything then?

KEARNEY: Yeah, white people did. They would't give colored people too much of that kind of stuff though. They know they liable to get loose--get crazy down there.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did they make their own or did they buy it?

KEARNEY: They bought some and they made it.

DR. CRAWFORD: Uh huh, did they--

KEARNEY: The biggest thing that they had was persimmon beer for coloreds. Now they had plenty of that, sorghum beer for you. they had plenty of that.

DR. CRAWFORD: Sorghum beer and persimmon beer.

KEARNEY: Yes sir. Now persimmon beer, why you could take and make it yourself, you know there's big barrels of it on the plantation. And whenever it come time for these fixings or the Fourth of July they'd have something for you to have to eat on that day. Excusing that why you got just plain food all along.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did they have a still on the plantation where they made whiskey?

KEARNEY: If they did I didn't see it. I know most they had one but where I didn't see it.

DR. CRAWFORD: I think they usually had one then.

KEARNEY: Yes sir. Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did Whit Kearney raise corn as well as cotton?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, he raised plenty corn. Yes sir. Had to, he had plenty of people to feed there. See, he'd have that meal, corn meal ground up and have it there for them, but you had a certain time to get it.

DR. CRAWFORD: How many people do you guess he had to feed there?

KEARNEY: Oh, I know about five or six hundred of 'em in all. Cause he had some that cleaned up, some working the grounds, some cleaning up ground all the time, you know.

DR. CRAWFORD: Cleaning new ground?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. Burning logs and cleaning up, then you had a bunch doing nothing but

farming.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you have any idea how big his plantation was?

KEARNEY: No sir, I do not know. I couldn't tell you to save my life. Cause I could have went over it, driving around but I never knowed when I got to--went inside there, but I know one thing; the children wouldn't mix, they wouldn't let 'em mix.

DR. CRAWFORD: With other plantations?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. Had to keep 'em all on his side and they kept theirs on their side unless you asked him. You ask him why then you could go to the other side and play, but they had a certain time to get in. Don't be out after sundown, let sundown catch you at home.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did everyone have to be in at sundown?

KEARNEY: Yes sir! Everyone had to be at their place at sundown.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did they have patrols--patrolers along the road to see about that after dark?

KEARNEY: Oh no sir they didn't have to have none, cause Old Master was going to see that they's coming in and the others going to see that they's coming in and the parents had to give an account of 'em when they get to the house.

DR. CRAWFORD: Who had to give them an account, the parents?

KEARNEY: Their parents had to give an account--they was at home such and such a time, cause he going to find out. He would get on that horse, he'll find out

what's going on.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you know if Whit Kearney used any overseers or did he watch everything himself?

KEARNEY: He had overseers.

DR. CRAWFORD: Were they white or black.

KEARNEY: Colored, white--he just--mostly was colored though, with his work.

VANCIL: Mr. Kearney.

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

VANCIL: Did you ever think you would live as long as you have?

KEARNEY: No sir, I didn't think it. I did not think it, but they told me if I be obedient, mind Old Master, do what he say why I live a long time. And I'm here. I don't say that keep me here but I'm here.

DR. CRAWFORD: Have you ever wondered, Mr. Kearney, why you lived so long, is it any way you eat or drink or take care of yourself or exercise or rest?

KEARNEY: I believe in a person taking his right kind of exercise or traveling and getting around. I believe that's a whole lot, but come down to the real knowing, I couldn't say but just the Lord taking care of me that much.

VANCIL: You have mentioned that a couple of times the Lord taking care of you; has religion always been a big part of your life?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

VANCIL: Have you always gone to church even when--

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

VANCIL: Even when you were at Whit Kearney's?

KEARNEY: Yeah, I've been going to church ever since I know what a church was. During slavery when they was going to the bush arbor down at the pryaing ground, I was right there, children following like a--pig following his mammy when he's going to the woods picking up acorns. We'd go behind them the same way. Going to the praying ground; didn't care how it was storming or nothing about it, they'd go there. It come a storm, the clouds coming up back there, it's going to be a storm, you couldn't keep 'em out of the woods.

VANCIL: Why is religion so important to you?

KEARNEY: Well that's the place where they felt like they would get quick and first from the Lord and they'd go there and they pray, they believe the Lord would hear them quicker then than they would be in the house and would do and I know the tree limbs be falling off all around and they'd be there on their knees praying to him for just what I'm enjoying now.

VANCIL: And you think ah, you think it's the Lord that's given you the long life that you have?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. He's given it to me. I believe that with my whole heart and mind on account of I've been obedient and did like I said and I've traveled like I said and I've did what they thought--what they said was going to happen--I looked for it. And they said every knee on the top side of this earth should bow to the Lord, even the beast and the fowl of the air. Well, I

went to the place where I could see it. I didn't want to take nobody's word, I wanted to go out and see and hear and I've seen cows, horses, mules, everything make a noise at that time praying to the Lord.

DR. CRAWFORD: What kind of time was this, Mr. Kearney?

KEARNEY: It was noon time, at night, the first year--the first of the year, but it was at midnight. And if you go in the woods where these beasts is and listen at 'em you may know it's something going on cause they--it's just like a person groaning when he dies. He'll go uhmmmm, everything make the noise at that time. That's a bow to the Lord. And I believe that's one thing that keeps us a going. That's my belief, I believe we all have to bow and if you bow and bow right, you'll be here.

VANCIL: Bow to the Lord?

KEANREY: Sir?

VANCIL: Bow to the Lord?

KEARNEY: Bow to the Lord. Yes sir.

VANCIL: Are you glad you've lived so long?

KEARNEY: Yes sir! I'm glad of it. I can tell other people what I've done seen and let them want to see that they don't get to see. Now you want to see a cow, hog, everything wild out in the woods would groan when that hour would come. You'd love to see it.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes sir. How would you know it was that hour, Mr. Kearney?

KEARNEY: Well, because they told me it was a certain hour of the night that time would come and they would do their bowing. They'd do their praying at a certain hour, I don't know whether it was the old new year or a new year,

a certain hour in the night, that's twelve o'clock, when that time come every thing on the top side of God's earth bows to him. And I went to it and I heard it and I know that.

DR. CRAWFORD: And did the preachers tell you when this would be and so forth?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, the preacher said so in the olden days and then the teacher from the ah-- older head taught me that all the way, my great grandmother, my great great grandmother taught me that and I believed it and I followed it and tried it and it worked out. I believe what she said and I went to the woods and found out for myself that it did do it.

VANCIL: What other thing have you seen in your life that have really surprised you? That you never thought you'd see?

KEARNEY: I don't know, so many things I've seen that I didn't think I'd ever see, I didn't think I'd ever live to see this time in now and the I didn't think I'd travel like I did and got by as full with that as I did. And I didn't think I'd ever be to a place to where I could save as many lives as I did during that high water and back in years out of the Mississippi River. I did that and I saved 'em and --

DR. CRAWFORD: How did you do that, with a boat?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, with one of these skiffs with oars to 'em.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember when that was? It was a big flood year, I guess.

KEARNEY: Yes sir it was a big flood, houses and

things floating down the Mississippi River. I went out there and got people off the top of houses and bring them to the Tennessee side. Went in the woods across from the Arkansas side, got peoples out of the trees and brought 'em over here in Tennessee.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, was that after you came back from Texas?

KEARNEY: Oh, that was before I went to Texas, that was in--back in 80.

DR. CRAWFORD: The flood of '88.

KEARNEY: It was back in 88, 87, something like that back in there.

VANCIL: That was after the Yellow Fever when you worked on the dead wagon?

KEARNEY: That was just before yellow fever. That's when it was. For the yellow fever come behind that.

VANCIL: Do you remember the flood?

DR. CRAWFORD: I'll check about the flood in '88. The figures weren't too well kept then, but that sounds right for a flood--'87 or '88. There were some other big flood years too, you know, but you had a boat then.

KEARNEY: Yes sir, I had a skiff. Go out there and get them in the houses cause the water was up to the top of them trees there and all the water was running down Front Street. The river was up there at the top of Front Street, running down the street and the houses was floating down there and I'd go out there and put a gig a long pole and gig that house anchor it to still water and go up beside it and get them folks out of them houses.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember what time in the year that was Mr. Kearney, was that in the summer or spring or--

KEARNEY: Spring. Ice was melting and coming out of the north up there down the Mississippi River. The Mississippi had been froze over and ice was melting in it so you could pull a skiff and I had to make; had a big place then you could go across where the sun was shinning on the water and melting.

DR. CRAWFORD: They had some awfully cold winters in the mid-eighties; about eighty-six, eighty-seven and maybe on into eighty-eight, I believe was true also.

VANCIL: Remember your first plane ride? did you-- I read somewhere that you took an airplane ride?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, I got an airplane ride, me and my wife, to Chicago and back.

VANCIL: When was that?

KEARNEY: Well, it was about four years ago, I know. Ask the boy, he might know. How long has it been, boy?

(BOY) Two years ago.

KEARNEY: What did he say?

VANCIL: Two years.

KEARNEY: I know it's--he knows, he keeps up with it now pretty good.

VANCIL? You went to Chicago?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, went to Chicago.

VANCIL: To see to see your son?

KEARNEY: Went up there and stayed with him and come back on the plane.

VANCIL: What did you think about that?

KEARNEY: I thought that was a smooth ride. But I seen it before I ride it.

I seen it.

VANCIL: What about--

KEARNEY: I think about World War I when they was fighting and they was talking about I think it was Hitler--ain't it? He's gonna whip the United States 'fore day in the morning. Do you remember that?

DR. CRAWFORD: That was World War II, yes sir.

KEARNEY: World War II or something.

DR. CRAWFORD: When Hitler was around.

KEARNEY: Yeah and they said they was gonna take the United States. I told 'em "no".

DR. CRAWFORD: You were right.

KEARNEY: He says, "Joe", That was the law in New Augusta then I was out there. And he said, "Joe, you say he ain't gonna do it"? I say, "He ain't gonna do it".

DR. CRAWFORD: That might have been World War I, the Kaizer when you were at New Augusta.

KEARNEY: Yes sir. And he says, "Joe, he'll whip 'em 'fore day in the morning just like that." I said "Well, he ain't gonna do it". And he ain't done it yet.

VANCIL: Remember the first time you saw a television?

KEARNEY: I was out in Augusta when I ssen the

first television. She had a television and I set up nearly all night looking at it to see when the World War I or whatever--when they was fighting, when they was gonna do it, I told 'em, I say you just give it a little more and I'll tell you. So that morning come and I told 'em. I said now I put my neck against my work. I meant I'd do it. I said I--I on my word, ain't gonna do it and they ain't did it yet.

VANCIL: What do you remember as the best times of your life--the happiest times?

KEARNEY: The happiest times of my life is when I'm at church serving the Lord. That's the happiest times I can get, I can enjoy that. As to for at home, I enjoyed my home all right, but the happiest times me enjoying something another that's gonna take care of you when you leave here.

VANCIL: What do you believe will happen when you leave here?

KEARNEY: I'll just go sleep away. Yes sir, I'll be like my father, he's gone but he told me and my brother to turn and just turn him over and turn him over he's gone.

VANCIL: Do you fear that time?

KEARNEY: Sir?

VANCIL: Do you--are you afraid of that time?

KEARNEY: No, no cause I'm gonna be resting.

VANCIL: It doesn't bother you at all?

KEARNEY: It don't bother me a bit. Say, if I'm like my daddy, you won't know I'm gone--just say he's asleep. That's the way he was.

VANCIL: And once that happens, the Lord will take care of you?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. He gonna take care of me.

VANCIL: What do you remember as the unhappiest times of your life?

KEARNEY: Well, you come in here and everybody's in an uproar and can't, look like get 'em settled, can't get their minds to rest, why then that's something I don't like. I just don't like nobody to get all upset and can't govern themselves. If you can govern yourself, you won't get in trouble. If you can govern yourself you'll live a long time, cause ain't nobody gonna have nothing against you. If anybody got anything against me I don't know it for trying to live.

VANCIL: Self-control is very important then?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

VANCIL: If you had--if you had anything to do over in your life, what--

KEARNEY: Say which?

VANCIL: If you had anything to do over if you could go back and change something in your life, would you change anything?

KEARNEY: Let me see, I've been around a hundred and--No, I wouldn't make any arrangements that I have. Nothing that I have to change to make me no happier than I am cause I believe I did my part in every respect with white and colored and I have no fear. If I had to go over where I did, I believe I'd be honest in what I'm doing.

VANCIL: If you had to ah--if you could do it,

would you not be a slave again?

KEARNEY: I wouldn't want to be that.

VANCIL: Do you think--do you think being a slave taught you anything that served you well later on?

KEARNEY: Well, being a slave I don't think I'd have no free getting around, like I should in other words, I hate to see 'em do other peoples where they was under me would be gettin mistreated or something, I'd hate to see that and I wouldn't want that to happen, so I just wouldn't want to be a slave. I want to be a free man till I sleep away.

DR. CRAWFORD: Mr. Kearney, could we come back and talk with you again some time?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. But I wish you had of put this off until after my birthday.

DR. CRAWFORD: Now your birthday is in June?

KEARNEY: No sir, it'll be in June.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, all right, we can talk with you later.

KEARNEY: June the second, I thought, you know that had been hinting right around taking pictures of me.

DR. CRAWFORD: Oh, I think we can get some pictures about your birthday time.

KEARNEY: See I be living, if I be living, whey that's when I'd be thinking you'd be coming in. Anytime you come though the Lord bless me, I'll be here.

DR. CRAWFORD: I believe you've got a better chance of

being living then than a lot of people we know, Mr. Kearney.

KEARNEY: I might have, I don't know that. I left that to the boss man. And he's the maker and whatever he do, why I'm satisfied. Yes sir.

VANCIL: Well, would it--do you think it'd be all right--we've--I still have some more questions I'd like to talk to you about; do you think it would be all right if we came back next Monday?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes sir. That's up to you, you're the one doing the driving, I'm just--

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, if that's all right, we'll try to come back and visit you a little next Monday morning, Mr. Kearney. And now we want to, we'd like to come on your birthday too, if we could do that.

KEARNEY: Oh, that's the second of June.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, I think that'd be a good time for us to come too. And be nice for us to get a camera if we could then and get a picture of you.

KEARNEY: Oh, yes sir, yes sir.

VANCIL: We'll see what we can do about that.

DR. CRAWFORD: Mr. Kearney, thank you very much.

THIS IS THE ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE OF MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY. THIS PROJECT IS "AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE "JOE KEARNEY PROJECT". THE PLACE IS MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE. THE DATE IS FEBRUARY 14, 1977, AND THE INTERVIEW IS WITH MR. JOE KEARNEY. THE INTERVIEW IS BY DR. CHARLES W. CRAWFORD, DIRECTOR OF THE MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE AND MR. PAUL VANCIL, REPORTER WITH THE MEMPHIS PRESS SCIMITAR. THE INTERVIEW IS TRANSCRIBED BY MS. CAROL LANEY.

MS. RODGERS: Daddy said something about you wanted to get the grandchildren and how many grandchildren or something like that. Did you want to get that?

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, we would like to have that.

MR. KEARNEY: I can't think of all of them now.

DR. CRAWFORD: I think as many children and grandchildren and great grandchildren and all of that as you have Mr. Kearney, I think I couldn't remember either all of them.

MS. RODGERS: You don't need the names of them, maybe but it's eleven grandchildren and twenty-two great grandchildren and three great, great grandchildren.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you mind if we read these names for the record then?

MS. RODGERS: No, it's all right.

DR. CRAWFORD: All right, I'd like to do that. Let me read some names here then for just a minute, Mr. Kearney about. Now we got your children. There are eleven grandchildren: Willie Mae Kearney, Ann Carter, Dorothy Mason, Joseph Kearney, Leon Kearney, Jackie Kearney, Harry Kearney, Claude Kearney,

Anita Kearney, Celeste Kearney, and Susie Kearney. There are twenty-two great grandchildren: Herman Johnson, Anthony Johnson, Kathy Johnson, Keith Johnson, Barry Carter, Michael Carter, Alvin Carter, Linda Carter, Kevin White, Alvin Rodgers, Alton (little Alton) Warder Mason and Ronrick?

MS. RODGERS: Well, she didn't know exactly how, but it is Roderick.

DR. CRAWFORD: Roderick Mason and Warren Maon following Alton Rodgers is Warren (is it?).

MS. RODGERS: One of them is Wanda. It's Wanda Kay, a little girl.

DR. CRAWFORD: Mason?

MS. RODGERS: Yeah. Wanda Mason.

DR. CRAWFORD: That's probably it here. All right, let's go back to number nine of the great grandchildren: Kevin White, 10, Alton (A-L-T-O-N) Rodgers, 11; Wanda Mason (W-A-N-D-A)?

MS. RODGERS: Yes, there is a Warren in there too. That's Wanda.

DR. CRAWFORD: All right. And number twelve Roderick Mason, number 13, Darlene Mason, 14, Jerry Mason, 15.

MS. RODGERS: Erick.

DR. CRAWFORD: Erick Mason, 16, Christeen Kearney, 17, Ray Lend-- Is that one word? R-A-Y-L-I-N-D Kearney.

MS. RODGERS: That's Crystal and Raylunden. That's what she's supposed to have there. It's supposed to be Raylunda.

DR. CRAWFORD: How do you spell that?

MS. RODGERS: I couldn't spell it exactly like they did. That's what it is supposed to be.

DR. CRAWFORD: Raylunda Kearney, 18 and 19 is listed Leon, two children but not the names.

MS. RODGERS: Uh huh.

DR. CRAWFORD: And 20 and 21 is Harry Kearney, two children but the names not listed. 22, Joseph Kearney one child but the name not listed. And three great, great grandchildren: Takena, T-A-K-E-N-A, 3; 2 Warren, W-A-R-R-E-N and 3 Ta-

MS. RODGERS: Tanesha and LeKewa. That is supposed to be Tanehsa, LeKewa and Warren. But this child that wrote them down, she just--

DR. CRAWFORD: Didn't spell it right?

MS. RODGERS: Tanehsa, LeKewa and Warren.

DR. CRAWFORD: Tanesha--

MS. RODGERS: LeKewa and Warren and LeKewa--those are in Great Britain.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you know how you spell them, Ms. Rodgers?

MS. RODGERS: No, I can get her mother and find out exactly how you spell them and I will have that for you.

DR. CRAWFORD: Might do that later. Three great, great grandchildren.

MR. VANCIL: Like I was saying, I wish I had seen you on TV because it was Roderick who took you to school, right?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir.

MR. VANCIL: Did you talk to his class?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir.

MR. VANCIL: What did you tell them?

MR. KEARNEY: I told them that I was here along the time of slaves, in other words, why I told them about how I was treated when I was in Old Master's plantation, take care of us...(There is a knock at the door and Mr. Kearney calls "Come in").

MS. POPE: How are you doing?

MR. KEARNEY: Oh, good, how are you?

MS. POPE: I'm doing all right. I believe you are the one I'm looking for.

MR. KEARNEY: Me?

MS. POPE: Yeah.

MR. KEARNEY: Yes mam, that's me.

MS. POPE: Well, you are my uncle. That's the reason I'm trying to find you.

MR. KEARNEY: Oh, I'm your uncle?

MS. POPE: Yeah. You're my great uncle. You was my mother's uncle, I believe. When I talk to you we'll find out.

MR. KEARNEY: Oh.

MS. POPE: Let me tell you my husband. O.K?

MR. KEARNEY: They come from where I was raised. I was born in Sardis.

MS. POPE: That is where I was born. Oh, that is so pretty, I can't get mine to look like that. But you've got a different kind of pump than I do.

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir, how are you doing?

MR. POPE: Fine, how are you doing?

MR. KEARNEY: Joe Kearney.

MR. POPE: I'm glad to see you. He looks just like he's in the paper, ain't he?

MS. POPE: They're taping something.

MR. KEARNEY: Have a chair. Get you a chair and sit down and rest.

MR. VANCIL: Why don't you go ahead and talk to Mr. Kearney, we'll just listen if it is OK. You say that you are related to him?

MS. POPE: I think so.

MR. VANCIL: We're taping something with Mr. Kearney, an interview and we are going to write something about him.

DR. CRAWFORD: But just go right ahead and talk with him, we'll learn some things from that, if you like.

MS. POPE: Yes, what I was trying to find out, was you any relation to Ike Kearney?

MR. KEARNEY: Ike Kearney, that's my uncle.

MS. POPE: Yes, and his wife was Louise Kearney.

MR. KEARNEY: Yeah.

MS. POPE: Uh Huh. Well, she had some daughters, lots of daughters and I'm one of her daughters. I'm Ike Kearney's grandaughter.

MR. KEARNEY: Well, I will say.

MS. POPE: Uh huh, which was Dora Kearney and she married to Gibson, Richmond Gibson. And I have been trying to find you because they said we had some people here and I was just trying to find you. I've been wanting to come over here for a long time but I've been sick, so I just decided to find you today.

MR. KEARNEY: Well, I'm glad you found me. It's been a long time, but you beat me, I ain't never been sick.

MS. POPE: Well, I've been sick a lot.

MR. KEARNEY: I ain't never had a doctor but once in my life.

MR. VANCIL: What is your name now?

MS. POPE: My name is Bessie Gibson Pope.

MR. VANCIL: And you say that he is your great uncle?

MS. POPE: Yes.

MR. VANCIL: And where do you live?

MS. POPE: I live in Memphis on Willett, 1018 South Willett.

MR. VANCIL: But you've never met Mr. Kearney?

MS. POPE: No, I've never met him until today.

MR. VANCIL: How did you find out about him?

MS. POPE: Through the paper.

MR. VANCIL: The article?

MS. POPE: The article in the paper.

MR. VANCIL: Oh yeah, this was about a year ago, wasn't it? This is the Elton Roard column that the Press Scimitar published about Mr. Kearney.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was that about the time of Mr. Kearney's birthday?

MR. VANCIL: I believe it was.

MS. POPE: Yes, it said 106.

MR. POPE: I think he was one-hundred-and-six.

MR. VANCIL: The date on the paper is June 4, 1976. That's a couple of days after your birthday. So you just set out to find Mr. Kearney?

MS. POPE: Yes, I did.

MR. KEARENY: Well, this is him.

MR. POPE: She had an uncle up here, a minister and she knew she had him up here, her mother's brother. But after she saw that he was a Kearney and he was from Sardis, that's where the other Kearney's was from, Sardis. That was where she was born and raised, Sardis. And she wanted to find him then.

MR. KEARNEY: This is him.

DR. CRAWFORD: It was a big family, wasn't it?

MS. POPE: It was a very big family because I come from a family of thirteen myself.

MR. KEARNEY: Do you live here in town, I didn't know that.

MS. POPE: Yeah, I live here, I live over on Willett.

MR. KEARNEY: I didn't know that, I was raised here but I never did know how my people was that come here.

MR. POPE: Well, over there in the vicinity where we live once it was just only just predominantly white. But since that time things have changed somewhat and so on. If any-

body was coming to our home, if they was going west on Walker they would turn off, right turn on Willett, if they was going east they would take a left turn and we live in a beige brick home. We have a beige brick home.

DR. CRAWFORD: Are you close to South Parkway?

MR. POPE: We're not too far from South Parkway but you know where Walker is, you know Parkway and Walker runs parallel.

DR. CRAWFORD: Walker is north of Parkway, isn't it?

MR. POPE: Yeah. Walker is north of Parkway. Walker is between Lamar and Parkway, just about central, I mean central distance.

DR. CRAWFORD: I know that place because I have a friend, Professor Sims at LeMoyn Owen who lives on South Willett, just south of the Parkway.

MR. POPE: That would be, me going Parkway that would be to my left.

MR. KEARNEY: Well, I've got a lot of kin-folks but I don't know 'em. They say there is some more down there in Sardis and I ain't never seen them.

MS. POPE: Yeah, I have three sisters down there in Sardis and my father is down there. He is out in California now. But my mother, she passed, Dora.

MR. POPE: What was that he said when he came off the river that your father was talking about?

MS. POPE: He was talking about him.

MR. POPE: He was talking about him. I know he was talking about somebody that came off the river that

worked on the river that Lemont Gibson was talking about.

MR. KEARNEY: Oh, you talking about when I used to work on the river.

MR. POPE: Yeah.

MR. KEARNEY: Yeah, I cut many, many hundreds of pounds of ice out of the Mississippi River, packed it in sawdust and carried it over for the summer. Yes sir, when that river used to freeze over. We ain't had no winters in a long time, we had the worst winter this time than we've had in a long time. Ice on some roads was froze over and I ain't never heard tell of that in a long time until here this year.

MR. POPE: You know I was up in Duluth, Minnesota about twenty-five years ago and look like was worse than it was up there.

MR. VANCIL: Mrs. Pope, do you have any other relatives who have been looking for Mr. Kearney?

MS. POPE: Well, my sister down in Mississippi, she had said that she was going to try to find him, but I'm the one that set out to find him when I seen the picture in the paper. I was the one that really wanted to find him.

MR. VANCIL: That was over a year ago though.

MS. POPE: Yeah, I started the rest of them, but I have benn calling backwards and forwards trying to find him.

MR. POPE: That's not been over a year ago though, I mean I'm not trying to correct you but it would have to be passed June in 1977 to be over a year.

MR. VANCIL: Yeah, you're right, I'm thinking of the wrong year.

MR. POPE: You would be thinking about '75. See, we are speaking about '76.

MR. VANCIL: Yes, so that would be about eight months.

MR. POPE: That's right.

MR. KEARNEY: Well, there's somebody down there that knows me come up here and they stayed at Como, I believe, up there by the Como, say they are kin to me. I don't know them. It's been so long you know when I was down there.

MR. POPE: Y'all don't have any people at Como, do you?

MS. POPE: No, we don't have, I don't know, it might be some distant cousins or something like that in Como, but we're originally from Sardis. That's where we started from.

MR. KEARNEY: I'm from Sardis, I wouldn't know it now if I would get there.

MS. POPE: No, it's probably the same thing when you left it that it still is.

MR. POPE: They probably haven't built one store since you left there.

MS. POPE: It's still the same.

MR. KEARNEY: Yeah, I wouldn't know it if I was going down there, looking for it and nobody didn't tell me, I wouldn't know Sardis.

MR. VANCIL: Ever since you left Sardis, you've never been back?

MR. KEARNEY: No sir, I ain't been back there. Been all

around it but I ain't been there.

MS. POPE: Well, it's still the same. I know it hasn't changed sine I was a child so it's been like that ever since I was...

MR. KEARNEY: You know where Fish Point is down there, that big lake you've got down there?

MS. POPE: Yeah.

MR. KEARNEY: It's a house on it and my great, great grandmother died in that house.

MR. POPE: On Sardis Lake?

MR. KEARNEY: Yeah.

MR. POPE: We ought to down there and look at it and take a picture of it.

MR. KEARNEY: My great, great grandmother died in that house and they wouldn't tear it down. They wouldn't let them tear it down now.

MR. POPE: Mr. Kearney, pardon me for interrupting but let me ask you something please sir, if I may. Where did your people originally from before they...

MR. KEARNEY: North Carolina.

MR. POPE: North Carolina? My people are originally from Maryland. One segment of them was Colliers' and the other segment was Carters'. I have lots of distant people in Georgia that the Carters' bought from the Colliers' up in Maryland and so some of my people now--half of them is Carters' and the other half is Colliers'. Colliers' sold some and they kept some, so they sold them the Carters' and they came from Georgia to Mississippi down by the way of

Stonefield a long time ago. By a little old boat when they used to have a boat coming up a creek down in Mississippi and Greenville and Leland called Dill Creek. Boats used to come up there a long time ago and bring supplies when Leland wasn't anything but just a liktle supply station.

MR. KEARNEY: You might say just an old creek. It's been a long, long time since I've seen any of my folks from there until the last year or two. I hadn't never seen none of 'em.

MS. POPE: Well, I set out to find you. I said I wouldn't give it up until I did.

MR. KEARNEY: Well, I know you must have set out to find me because you was on a straight track of me.

MS. POPE: Well, where does Liza stay, what is Liza's house number? I've got it wrong here, I've got 2749 for her number.

MR. KEARNEY: Well, that's down the street here about four blocks.

MR. POPE: About three blocks.

MR. KEARNEY: See, he own this house, I'm just renting from him.

MR. POPE: We want to go by to see him.

MR. KEARNEY: Oh, there is no need to hurry.

MR. POPE: I just appreciate looking at a man that had sense enough to live a hundred years. People now ain't got sense enough to live twenty.

MR. VANCIL: Well, you know Dr. Crawford thinks--he is the Professor of History over at Memphis State--and he thinks that...

MS. POPE: Oh, yeah, I've seen him a lot on TV.

DR. CRAWFORD: Thank you.

MR. VANCIL: I haven't seen you a lot on TV. Where've I been?

DR. CRAWFORD: I had a regular program last year.

MR. VANCIL: Oh, did you?

DR. CRAWFORD: Uh huh.

MR. POPE: Well, he was the one what was on?

MS. POPE: Uh huh. From Memphis State.

MR. POPE: I'm not trying to say anthing embarrasing or anything but you really got the sense that you had on TV?

DR. CRAWFORD: I don't know sir.

MR. POPE: Well, you got grades on it. Do you write your script or do you just get up and just--how do you do?

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, I think in that case I didn't have it written, sir. I think they asked me questions but it was something I knew about, so it wasn't any problem.

MR. POPE: Well, you just know right on just like you was reading off a script.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, I have written some books and in them you know I have to write it out several times and get it just right. I hope in one of the books that I do later

we'll have a picture of Mr. Kearney. I had some other famous black people in Memphis such as Robert Church and people like that, but next time we get one out we're going to have to get Mr. Kearney, too.

MR. VANCIL: I was saying that you were talking about Mr. Kearney living more than a hundred years. Dr. Crawford thinks he may be much older than a hundred-and-six. What do you think? A hundred-and-eighteen or something in that neighborhood?

DR. CRAWFORD: I think so because you see, Mr. Kearney remembers things that happened. Now you see, the paper said that he was a hundred-and-six which would have meant that he was born about in 1870, but he remembers things that happened six years before that because you know the Yankee troups didn't come until six years before that. And then he was in slavery several years before that. I think at least six years before that. I don't know how old he was when they came and he doesn't know either. But I think he had to be at least six, so that would make 118. And I am sure of that because you know if he is 106 he wasn't here when those things happened. Because they happened about a hundred-and-twelve years ago and I think he had to be at least 106 years old when it happened. So he is older than 106, I am sure of that.

MR. KEARNEY: When they taken that silver and gold and all out of the house, why that was something then, you know they had to bury it and that was done a year or two before the Yankees come through here. And the houses was all cleaned up of that silver and gold and when they come through, they stole all such stuff--meat, flour and things like that in the smokehouse and wherever they could find it you know out there in the yard and told them to come on and get it. I was a

great big young'un then. Of course I shinned Old Master's shoes.

MS. POPE: Yeah, you was doing all that for Old Master.

MR. KEARNEY: There was a piece of brass across there and the heel back here and I had to keep that looking like gold all the time.

MS. POPE: You look well, you don't look a day over sixty. Yeah, you look well, I'm glad I found you.

MR. VANCIL: He is young looking for a hundred-and-eighteen, isn't he?

MS. POPE: He sure is.

MR. POPE: He's been taking care of himself.

MR. KEARNEY: I don't know, the way I have hoboed around through the country. I've been everywhere except across the water looks like.

MR. POPE: I sure wish you had brought your camera.

MR. KEARNEY: I ain't never had no temperature or nothing like that. Of course I do thank the Lord for letting me live healthy. I ain't been sick, ain't had the doctor but once in my life. I think that's wonderful. And my health was guaranteed back in yellow fever time for twenty-five years and I ain't never been sick since. They operated on me then and guaranteed it for eight more years and I ain't been sick yet. I don't know. The Good Lord's just been keeping me here.

MR. KEARNEY: Come in.

MS. POPE: This is your uncle Joe. Now this is my daughter. This is your great, great grandaughter.

MR. KEARNEY: Well, well, well. How you? Bless your heart, I'm glad to see you. Get a chair there and sit down.

MR. VANCIL: Why don't you sit over here, I'll bring a chair.

MR. KEARNEY: There is a chair right there. Have you got some more out there?

MS. POPE: No, that is the only one I got.

MR. KEARNEY: I see the pictures of the Kearney's in your face.

MS. POPE: In my face. Yeah, that'w where I originated from, the Kearney's.

MR. KEARNEY: Yeah, it's been a long time since I've seen any of them folks, just to know it. I ain't seen boys and Sardis folks--the last time I saw them was on a plantation back up there on a field somewhere, I don't know where they was at that time. It's been a long time ago.

MR. POPE: You know, your uncle got a smile just like you.

MR. KEARNEY: I think it's right smart of them to come see me. I ain't never seen them. I think they think a whole lot of me.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, it's good to have kin-folks, isn't it, Mr. Kearney?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes, sir, it's good to have them but you would like to know them. But they all have nothing but good times so you can have your name in the paper somewhere.

At church yesterday they was walking around taking pictures of me. every one would stand beside me and I didn't even know them and they snapped a picture of me. What they doing it for, I don't know. They will have something in their house to be looking at all time. But I do thank the Lord for my early days up until now. I never been in bad shape and never been in a fight in my life, never been arrested, no way. The only way I know what a jailhouse looked like was just to see somebody in there, so I'm well-blessed. I've seen a many of them there, many of them hung. I've seen all of that in this life. I've seen a man hung on the old jail in town there years ago. When they snapped that trip out from under him, people dropped to the ground just like that.

DR. CRAWFORD: When was that?

MR. KEARNEY: That was back in the '80's.

DR. CRAWFORD: What was that for, do you know, Mr. Kearney?

MR. KEARENY: I couldn't tell what it was for because they was all out there, but what they hung him for, I don't know.

MR. VANCIL: Was this around here in Memphis?

MR. KEARNEY: It was right there at the old jail. Do you know where the old jail house is up there? It's a dog pound up there now. I reckon it is.

DR. CRAWFORD: North Main, isn't it?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: Out that way.

MR. VANCIL: Was this a black man or a white man?

MR. KEARNEY: It was a colored man. They hung him and when they snapped that trip out from under

him, it just got dark all at once. Poured down rain, but everybody hit the ground.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was there a big crowd for things like that?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir. There was a big crowd of them. They had the street blocked so nobody could go by. They had to stop the traffic at that time there was so many folks there. They wanted everybody to see it. But what they hung him for I don't know. But they did it and when that trigger fell they fell. It was so dark it looked like you could feel it at nine o'clock in the day.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did they hang many people then?

MR. KEARNEY: Oh, if they did something they hung them. Yes sir, they would hang them. Many of them.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was there any certain time that they did it, on Saturday or any time like that?

MR. KEARNEY: On Friday.

DR. CRAWFORD: On Friday?

MR. KEARNEY On Friday.

MR. KEARNEY: Anything that had to do for a certain day in the year, or week or month, they set aside for that. That was the trial day, Friday. They could do what they was going to do to you on that day, more or less. Anybody get hung now it would be more or less on the last of the week or Friday. That's what they was supposed to do.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you see many of them, Mr. Kearney? Many hangings?

MR. KEARNEY: Oh yeah, in my lifetime, I've see them. I've seen a whole lot of them. I've seen them chop their head off if they do something that wasn't right they would carry

you to the chopping block.

MR. VANCIL: The chopping block?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir. That's where they hang you and chop your head off.

MR. VANCIL: Was this while you were in Memphis or in Sardis?

MR. KEARNEY: No sir, that was while I was on the plantation.

MR. VANCIL: Did you see somebody get his head chopped off?

MR. KEARNEY: Oh, they would chop his head off, yes sir.

MR. VANCIL: With an ax?

MR. KEARNEY: With an ax but it was one of them about that wide, then you sharpen it just like a--you didn't notice on TV, they had it on TV, showing that big old blade ax they had.

MR. VANCIL: But they chopped his foot off then.

MR. KEARNEY: They chop your head off with it too, see.

MR. VANCIL: What would somebody have to do?

MR. KEARNEY: Well, kill somebody or did something wrong and they found it out--run off. If they didn't want to be under that master, why you'd run off and they'd catch you they'd have hunters you know, on horses or trap you just like the polices now on each car, get you and carry you back up there to that chopping block. And if it was necessary to do it, chop your head off.

MR. POPE: I know I would have got my head chopped off because I would have been trying to go every chance I got. You know that happened to the black people, but the

black people haven't been the only people that have been slaves and servants. It's been almost all races, all segment of people. We have some segment now that's in a sense of speaking almost a slave. What I mean from bringing the black man over here to America, do you know that the black man have made more improvement in educational and any other sort of step that you would take by him since he come out from slavery than those that was left over there that was never captive. Now you take over here, if a white man lives in a brick house, you keep on driving you will see a black one living in one. If a white come by driving a Continental, after a while you will see a black one come by driving one, so the black have made a great strive and he couldn't make it without the white because how that the black man can make a step without the white man hold him up. It's impossible because the white man has the power, he has the money and everything and the only way the black man could go forward, the white had to push him. And I mean, it's that way until right today.

MR. VANCIL: But it has changed today, don't you think?

MR. POPE: It won't ever change from that because I know it won't. Any time that a black man steps forward today he is going to have some white back up from somewhere. Now you may not know anything about it, it may be sort of secret like you've seen in a large store or something. But when you just dig down and how did he get there? Where did he get his back up from to be there in that store and trace it on back and you will find out that he had a white friend somewhere. Because we are here together and we got to live together in the only way we step forward, we step forward together. We can't step forward and one step in one way and one step in the other. See if you knew the way to

Memphis and you was in Detroit and you knew the way to Memphis and I didn't know the way to Memphis, you was the only one, how would I get here without getting lost without you leading me some sort of way or set down and write out the way for me to come. Well, when I get here I may get here and get me a great name but how di I get here? You back there and ain't never been here but you pilot the way for me to get here. I mean that is just a fact that is undeniable. It may be undesirable in some case for some people, but still it is undeniable, you can't dispute it.

MR. VANCIL: Speaking of education, as you were just a minute ago, did you ever have any formal education, Mr. Kearney?

MR. KEARNEY: No kind. Talking about going to school or something like that.

MR. VANCIL: Yeah. Any kind of schooling at all.

MR. KEARNEY: No sir. I never had no schooling at all.

MR. VANCIL: You never went to--

MR. KEARNEY: But I learned how to kind of even my monies that I got. I'd break up sticks and lay where I want for a dollar, lay a long stick there and I want a quarter I lay a short stick there, a little shorter and a little shorter and so I got it down to a nickel and that's the way I'd do. That's the only way I counted my money, just learn how to count money.

DR. CRAWFORD: And you never got to go to school at all, then Mr. Kearney?

MR. KEARNEY: No, I never did go to school at all.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, you see now a lot of his grandchildren and great grandchildren, I guess about all

of them are in school, aren't they?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir. All but this little boy you see walking around here now.

MR. VANCIL: You never learned to read or write?

MR. KEARENY: No sir, not a bit.

MR. VANCIL: How do you sign your name?

MR. KEARNEY: Well, I make a X.

MR. VANCIL: Is there somebody at the door there?

MR. KEARNEY: The postman.

MR. VANCIL: In slave times weren't there any attempts by your mother or father to show you how to do certain things or did they know how?

MR. KEARNEY: They knowed how to do them kind of work, but they never did get a learning. My mother got a learning out from under the, I think it was the blue back starter she had there, she would study it.

MR. VANCIL: Well, the master, Whit Kearney didn't want you to learn anything, did he?

MR. KEARNEY: No sir. He didn't want you to learn nothing. Take care of his children and shine his shoes and have his clothes clean and meals fixed.

MR. POPE: They had the blue back...

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir.

MR. VANCIL: Well, despite the fact that you have never had any formal education, do you think that life, just your experiences in life has given you what you call wisdom?

MR. KEARNEY: Well, I do think that that's the only way that I could get anything is studying and

looking at other people traveling and learning what I see to work up to where I'm at because I've been lots of places that I didn't think I'd ever go and got out, by just turn my head and listen to other people and know how to go. But that's the only way I went through the world and I've been near about from coast to coast. I was in the mountains when they was bringing people from the old country over here to work in the mines and they brought five-hundred over here at one time and I'll tell you the first time I ever seen one. They brought him over here in the mountain where they was working, digging ore or cutting ore. It just slid and killed every one of them.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was that in Alabama now, in the ore mines?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir. That was in the ore mine. Then they left there and in the rock quarry. I've seen them up there men standing up on top of the mountain so high up that they looked like a little boy, walking around here in the floor and you standing down there working. I've seen a boy jump off that mountian with him on it and when he hit the ground he was just splattered, just like somebody would take him and just strew it out. They had to rake him up and put him in a sheet to bury him.

MR. VANCIL: If you were to look back on your life, what kind of lessons would you say life has taught you, what have you learned that you have always lived by?

MR. KEARNEY: Well, now of course now I look back in my life, why such a thing as working I wouldn't want to go over some of it. I was a boiler once, first I was a railroad man under Alloid. I fired under him about a year before him and George had a collision in that south yard there in Main on the Memphis IC yard down

there. After that collision then, they had that wreck, why I quit the railroad then.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you know about when that was, Mr. Kearney?

MR. KEARNEY: No sir, not just exactly the year.

DR. CRAWFORD: Back before World War I?

MR. KEARNEY: Oh, yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: Before you went to New Augusta?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir. It was way before then.

DR. CRAWFORD: Were you working for the Illinois Central?

MR. KEARNEY: I was working for the IC and left htere and went to the--I reckon it was the Illinois Central because me and my daddy put that bridge across the Mississippi River back in them days.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you ever hear about Casey Jones?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you ever see Casey Jones?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir, I seen him.

DR. CRAWFORD: What was he doing when you saw him?

MR. KEARNEY: He was walking when I seen him, but I knowed him all well. Casey Jones and Jessie James and another gangster in there, I can't think of his name, but I knowed all of them, seen them.

MR. VANCIL: Do you feel like life keeps teaching you things--every year do you learn something new?

MR. KEARNEY: No sir, it's all new to me, but just like

somebody teaching me things like that--just like automobiles and things why it was years before they come in, they said it was going to be but I didn't believe it, but now I've drove one and that old T-Model Ford, that was one of the first ones I seen. And for the airplane, I didn't theink there was ever one of them and I was in Augusta when they put TV's out. What we're looking at now, I was in Augusta when the first one I seen. I was working there at Ruth Dunn's. He's the constable in that town and they got one and had it there in the house and I would come up there and in the evening when I got out of the field and go up there and look at it, that was World War I, I think it was. Along in there.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was that television or radio?

MR. KEARNEY: It was television, pictures like I've got now.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes sir, that would have been after World War II.

MR. POPE: Yes sir, because World War I, television didn't really get out to people until World War II. But the radios did.

MR. KEARNEY: Yeah, we had one of them in the house. I'd sit down and listen to it.

MR. VANCIL: When they told you about it you never believed...

MR. KEARNEY: I never believed it, I didn't believe that would ever happen...

MR. POPE: What's your name?

DR. CARWFORD: Charles Crawford.

MR. POPE: Mr. Crawford you know a long time ago

they had the juke box was something similiar to our TV today. You know you would put a dime in there and you would see the people up there dancing to the music playing or something, the TV probably similar come out to that. But that back, J. P. Seabrook put that out back years ago, long ago. Because Seabrook's place was put out elective for a team that would play records. You might have seen something similar to that. It's gone now.

DR. CRAWFORD: You don't see them any more.

MR. POPE: You don't see them any more, but you know they were old when they went out. You know you put your dime in there, if you had a dime and you could hear the music and see the people dance.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, that's true.

MR. POPE: That's been probably, I guess that machine would be ninety years old now if someone had one.

DR. CRAWFORD: There must be some somewhere, but I don't know where you would find one.

MR. POPE: I doubt if you would, if you found it, it would be a round machine.

DR. CRAWFORD: In a museum or something.

MR. VANCIL: Cars and radios and airplanes and TV's must have all been a surprise to you but I bet the biggest surprese was seeing a man on the moon.

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir.

MR. VANCIL: Did you ever think that would ever happen?

MR. KEARNEY: I didn't think it would ever happen. I

didn't think I would ever see a man flying around in the air in an airplane either, but he did. Because I told them I said I didn't believe it. But he said, "Joe, they are sure doing it". And when he come through why then I seen it was true.

MR. VANCIL: And you actually took a ride in an airplane didn't you?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir.

MR. VANCIL: Did you ever think you would be on TV like you were last week?

MR. KEARNEY: No sir, I didn't think I would ever be on there.

MR. VANCIL: You saw yourself, didn't you?

MR. KEARNEY: I sure did.

MR. VANCIL: Were you surprised at the way you talked or looked?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir, they told me I had to talk loud, you know for to get the understanding from where I was sitting down and they had to put a tag on me up there that...

MR. VANCIL: That holds the microphone?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir. For me to get my voice high because I talk low, you know and they couldn't have understood what I was saying. But I know, I have seen it on TV what that was for. I was thankful that there was somebody that would take time to do that.

MR. VANCIL: Well, I bet they were thankful to get a chance to talk to you. When you were growing up, wheat kind of advice did your parents give you? What did they tell you to do?

MR. KEARNEY: Well, the main thing they told me to be obedient to your master and your mother and father and your days shall be lengthened.

MR. VANCIL: Shall be what?

MR. KEARNEY: Lengthened.

MR. VANCIL: Lengthened?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir. In other words they told me, said now if you will be obedient child, you be a law aviding citizen. If anything comes up and you see it and you say it was that the law will take charge of it because you are a law abiding citizen. You ain't never been arrested and they will take your word for it before they will a person that's been arrested.

MR. VANCIL: And you've never been arrested, have you?

MR. KEARNEY: No, I ain't never been arrested in my life.

MR. VANCIL: And it's because of that advice...

MR. KEARNEY: I've tried to live like they said so I would be a law abiding citizen. Always treat you like I want you to treat me. Don't go over there because I've got the advantage of you in size or something, try to run over you, but just treat you just like I want you to treat me. And that's the way I live.

MR. VANCIL: That's what religion teaches too, isn't it?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir, that is. And they tell you, say now listen if you want something and you see it and it don't belong to you go after the one that belong for it that it belong to and they will give it to you. Because I've tried that. And anything you ask the master for above, he'll be managing it for you.

MR. VANCIL: What did you say, the master, Jesus.

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir. Anything that you ask him for and mean it from your heart, he will grant it to you.

MR. VANCIL: He'll answer your prayers then?

MR. KEARENY: He'll answer them.

MR. VANCIL: What kind of things have you ask for in your life?

MR. KEARNEY: Well, when they was fighting, I don't know whether it was World War I--I know my brother was coming from Maine, he was in the army. They come to me and ask me was--well they did say Hitler would whip the United States. they said just lacking a hair whipping the United States. That was just before sundown. Julius Bates come down there, he was a white man. He said, "Joe, the United States will be whipped before midnight tonight". I said, "No, sir, I don't believe so". He said, "Well, it will". And I told him it wouldn't. He said, "Well, why do you know?" And I said, "Well, wait until in the morning and I will tell you". I went out there and called the Master up and talked to him about it and the next morning went on out there and told him. I said they would never do it and they ain't done it today.

DR. CRAWFORD: Your prayers have been for other people and other things then sometimes?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir, if it hadn't been for, I couldn't win them anyway if it hadn't been for my prayers because I didn't know where I was going. I was just loose in the world and going somehwere and wanted to learn something. And I done it, I learned how to work and take care of myself and I learned how to travel

and be mindful and I learned how to treat you as you wish to be treated and went on in that way. So I didn't think I lost a thing sinçe I've been in the world by minding older people and doing like they told me to do.

DR. CRAWFORD: And now Mr. Kearney, you're the oldest person you know.

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir.

MR. VANCIL: There might be a couple of people in this country who are older than you.

MR. KEARNEY: it might be, I don't know that.

MR. VANCIL: There's a man down in Florida that claims to be 132 years old.

MR. KEARNEY: Well, he's older than I am.

MR. VANCIL: But not much. I asked you about what advice your parents gave you. If you had to give some advice to say, little Elton here or any of your grandchildren, what would you tell them or what have you told them?

MR. KEARNEY: Well, I'd just tell them like they told me. I'd say, "Y'all be obedient ot your parents and honor the sheriff". This is the main thing that falls. That's Jesus' bouquet. That's his bouquet and whenever you see it, honor it and if you appreciate that and looking on it, you'll be going a long time. Because you should obey your parents then.

MR. VANCIL: What did you say is Jesus' bouquet?

MR. KEARNEY: It is this here--hair.

MR. VANCIL: Oh, it is your hair.

MR. KEARNEY: Your gray head. That's Jesus' bouquet.

MR. VANCIL: Everybody's hair or just your hair?

MR. KEARNEY: No sir that's just anybody when they live to get--their head gets white that's his bouquet. It's blooming then. Mine is blooming. Sometimes I walk straight up, get out there and walk like there ain't nothing bothering me. Then, I get out there and I just reel, rocking on my way home. That's what he said, "You'll come reeling and rocking on your way to my house". So that's the way I'm doing. Sometimes I can walk just ordinary walk straight, it don't bother me. Then again, I can't hardly get 'em together. I have to go kind of like that to get straightened out to go. Why, because I'm getting close to my going home days.

MR. VANCIL: If you had th power or the ability to give your grandchildren anything in the world, what do you think you would give them?

MR. KEARNEY: Well, I couldn't give 'em nothing to prize, tell 'em how to get to heaven and how to treat people here on earth to keep out of trouble. That's all that I know anything to do for 'em. And I know that will be all right.

DR. CRAWFORD: Have you always been a Baptist?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir.

MR. VANCIL: I was listening to some of the tapes that you had done before with the other fellow and you were talking about the police, the curfew in Memphis. Can you tell me a little bit more about that?

MR. KEARNEY: Polices, how they did?

MR. VANCIL: Yeah.

MR. KEARNEY: Yeah, they used to ride horses here. Then

there was the walking police. Then they had the horse police, just ride around and get so far off from their station that they had to ride because they couldn't make it there in time, they had to ride. That's what they had in them days on these what you call pratrols. Old wagon pulling a mule you know and lock them up in there and bring them to the calaboose when they didn't get into the jail, put them in the calaboose, a little old thing built up about like a bathroom. It was out of brick and had a door to it and they would put you in there and lock you up overnight until the morning come. Then take you out and carry you to the jail house. That's what they got around there.

MR. VANCIL: At that time, were there any rules that said that black people had to be in a certain place at a certain time?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir, had a rule you had to be in the house, didn't why something would happen to you before day in the morning. You had to get in.

MR. VANCIL: You had to get in by when though?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir, I remember when the young doctors riding horses down through there. I remember all that.

MR. POPE: I've got to go to work. I'll be back to see you.

MR. VANCIL: For the record, can we get your name? Stewart, is it?

MR. POPE: Yes, Stewart. Now, my name generally the way you spell it is S-T-U

MR. VANCIL: A-R-R?

MR. POPE: Yeah.

MR. VANCIL: And how do you spell your last name, P-O-P-E?

MR. POPE: No, no my last name is, see she used the Pope, quoting before we married and she used the Pope.

MR. VANCIL: Spell it again.

MR. OTTIS: O-T-T-I-S.

MR. VANCIL: O-T-T-I-S? O.K. Before you married then your name was Pope?

MS. POPE: Yes.

MR. VANCIL: I see. O.K.

MR. OTTIS: But get the record straight.

MR. VANCIL: It was nice to meet you.

MR. OTTIS: All right, it was nice to meet both of you.

MR. KEARNEY: I want to know why that they can get my voice and change it around and work it out and I just understand that when I was young. Several things that they did for me that I didn't know nothing about until I got up in size. They said I was in a trance three days and nights. They had me shrouded and laying on a cooling board three days and nights and hadn't been for my great grandmother, they would have buried me.

DR. CRAWFORD: When was that, Mr. Kearney?

MR. KEARNEY: That was when I was coming on a boy, a little fellow.

DR. CRAWFORD: Were you sick or something, they thought?

MR. KEARNEY: No sir, just went off in a trance. I hadn't never been sick.

MR. VANCIL: Was this down in Mississippi?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir, that was down in Mississippi on the old Master's plantation. She had been what they called a midwife. She kept them from burying me. You was buried out there in the yard or in the garden somewhere. White people was buried in the garden and colored folks was buried in the east part of the yard. That'w where the cemetary was. They didn't know nothing about no undertaker shop or nothing like that because they would go to the house and get a plant off there and make a coffin and put him in it and put him in the ground.

MR. VANCIL: You tell us about the rules they had in Memphis when you came to Memphis about black people had to be in at a certain time.

MR. KEARNEY: Yes, sir, any time after eleven o'clock at night you not allowed to be on the street.

MR. VANCIL: What would happen if...

MR. KEARNEY: Well, they would just...

MR. VANCIL: Put you in jail?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir, sput you in the calaboose and then carry you to jail and then have a trial. They wouldn't let you walk around here in town, walk around here in the streets as much as they had here.

MR. VANCIL: Did you have to keep on a certain side of the street?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir, you had to stay on a certain side. Now, if you was going this way, it would be

on this side and if you was coming from younder way, you come on that side and go on down the street to where you was going if you had to cross over, you'd get there and cross over and go on in the house. The old times ain't gonna be no more. They won't ever be no more. And I don't want to admit saying one thing and then go right back over it and you'd be putting down the same thing all the time. I'd love to be so I could run into it just like a man saying his ABC's, just on and on and on and then it will be easier for you to copy and it will be easy for me to say. But things like it is now looks like I would get all messed up and I would be saying on thing that I done tole you before.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, as we get some of that Mr. Kearney, that's all right, we'll just copy it one time.

MR. KEARNEY: Oh.

DR. CRAWFORD: So that's not any problem. Don't worry about that at all. Do you remember about the fire department in Memphis back before, when you first got here. What was it like then?

MR. KEARNEY: Well, the fire department at that time just an old hose, draw water out of a cistern and out of a well they put a fire out. They didn't have nothing but buckets and things to move it with. But since then it come to being a hydrante, forcing water to it.

DR. CRAWFORD: How did the firemen get around the city when you first came?

MR. KEARNEY: Well, the firemen got around with a horse and a wagon. They had a fire wagon and

had horses to it. Them horses was trained in case if that bell rang or whistle blowed for a fire, them horses knowed as much about it as I did. Whey they would run and get under that shaft. They would run and when they would step on that swing in there in the firehouse, why they would get a harness and then drop down on their face right then.

DR. CRAWFORD: I've got a picture of that in my book of the harness they had up overhead that they went right down on the horses.

MR. KEARNEY: Just right down on them. When they hit that they all fastened up on them. Why then, they would come out from there then going. The driver why he had to drive, you know so what way the fire had been.

DR. CRAWFORD: What color was the fire wagon?

MR. KEARNEY: The fire wagon was red and the old back wheels was black and the body part was red and striped like.

DR. CRAWFORD: Now where was the fire station then?

MR. KEARNEY: The fire station was down there on Main and, I don't know, they was so far apart-- one on Mian Street, one up there where the old log cabin whiskey store used to be on Main Street, one up there in north Memphis and back in the subburbs part. They had four or five, I know up and down Main Street and they would go out from there, but you had some out there on the subburbs of town. That was out there around Crump, you know past Burkeye. They had a fire department out there. It takes near about the whole town then because Memphis was small at that time.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did they have cisterns then?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir. They had cisterns, that's where they kept the water for the summer in that cistern and when it would get full why that was the end of it. There was cisterns all over town near about it at that time and some of them would go dry. Some of them would use the water out and some of them had a seep hole in it and the water would seep out in the ground. But the main part was they had them cisterns to catch the rain water a certain time of the year. Now see at times when you catch that rain water it would be insects in it. Then, at times you would catch that water and the insects would get in it, no way, shape, form or fashion. That's when they all flew up.

DR. CRAWFORD: Now, where were those cisterns, were they in the street or off the streets?

MR. KEARNEY: No sir, they was in the yard, in the house, some of them was in the house. The house was built over them and you go in and pumped it out or you could go in with a little bucket ot come over to go over and dump the water out that goes on a wheel like. Turn that wheel and it would come over and that water dropped down and dump out of that bucket and just keep on doing it until you get a bucket full or get as much as you want in that container or whatever you had there. When the commence digging wells they put a well under that house, but they would dig that well so deep down there, the water looked, when you got the water it looked like a just little bites of them down there in the ground and take a looking glass to find that.

DR. CRAWFORD: Uh huh, way down at the bottom of it.

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir.

MR. VANCIL: Mr. Kearney, was there ever a time when

you felt that your life was in danger when you were traveling around or from violence in any way, or sort?

MR. KEARNEY: No sir, I never did think of nothing that bothered me. I never was scarry.

MR. VANCIL: Never was what?

MR. KEARNEY: Never was scarry.

DR. CRAWFORD: You weren't scared of anything?

MR. KEARNEY: No sir. I always felt like whenever I was going, whichever way I was going, I just trust the Lord and go on. I felt like whatever they told me about the Lord, I believed it. See.

MR. VANCIL: You felt like he was always watching over you?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir. Night and day. I felt like he was watchman for getting around through the world, getting money for anything I want. I could ask him and I could go out it.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you pray often?

MR. KEARNEY: Me?

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes.

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir. That's the main thing, through prayer. I did it and I wasn't nowhere around nobody and I did it and when I was traveling and get ready for him that's like you and me get together out and go on and you going my way, I'll go with you. Because we go that way and Irishmen, they was the biggest hoboes there was, I reckon because when we would catch a train we was traveling, not hoboing, because he always thought more of himself than that. A person that

wanted to see the world and wanted to know something about what was in it he was just plain out in the woods by himself and go on. I went that way thats how come I know what I do about getting around. I did mine the hard way where it wasn't nobody to get a hitchhike unless you caught a freight train.

MR. VANCIL: How often would you pray? Did you pray every day?

MR. KEARNEY: Well, that's just daily work, every day.

MR. VANCIL: Before you would get up or go to bed or when?

MR. KEARNEY: Any time, all time through the day, just like I'm talking to you now. I'm just continaully talking to you but I'm praying inside. See. I'm talking, but I'm praying just the same. That prayer goes...

DR. CRAWFORD: It was sort of a state of mind or a way you felt, wasn't it?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir. Well, that's the way about going anywhere. You open your mind to go down this street, I don't care how dark it gets or how bad it is down there, if you are praying you can walk right on by and you can see.

DR. CRAWFORD: It has really helped you then?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir. It was a help to.

DR. CRAWFORD: I wonder what things you have done to help you live so long. Have you ever taken any vitamins?

MR. KEARENEY: No sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you ever smoke in your life?

MR. KEARNEY: I smoke now.

DR. CRAWFORD: You smoke now?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir. Chew tobacco, dip snuff, but I use a certain amount of it and no more.

DR. CRAWFORD: What do you smoke?

MR. KEARNEY: I smoke cigars, I don't smoke no cigarettes.

MR. VANCIL: Do you smoke a pipe?

MR. KEARNEY: I smoke a pipe, I don't smoke no cigarettes bur excusing that I don't got nothing else that bother me.

MR. VANCIL: Have you always smoked in your life?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir, I've always got some smoking. I started out with this old homemade tobacco out in the field that'w what I used all the time, nearly eight years, I used snuff.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you grow the tobacco on the plantation?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you make the snuff you used down there?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir. They wouldn't make it there but they would beat up tobacco, you know and use it like snuff.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you ever drink any alcoholic things in your life?

MR. KEARNEY: Like whiskey?

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes.

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir, I have drank a whole lot of it. But I didn't have no wild drinking, I

always drank in reason. Yes, I drink whiskey. I just keep it. If a person wanted to drink whiskey, I don't think he would drink it unless he kept it a quart here and one over here and another one down at the end of the field and one halfway to the field, if you wanted a drink, go get it. That's the way I used to do when I was farming. When I wanted any whiskey, I could get on either end and if I went to the house I could get it at the house just the same way. If I go in the house I was getting it and if I go outdoors I could have plenty out there, find my place and go get me a drink.

MR. VANCIL: You say you always drank within reason?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir. Drank in reason. What I mean by dirnking in reason, don't get drunk and get out there and curse everybody out up and down the street and nearly everybody know you're drinking.

MR. VANCIL: There must have been a couple of times in your life though that you have been drunk.

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir.

MR. VANCIL: Sir?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir, I've been drunk, but then I've been home.

MR. VANCIL: I see. Do you know what the Ku Klux Klan is?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir, I've seen what they call the Klu Klux Klan, why they would come in there and...

MR. VANCIL: You saw it?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir.

MR. VANCIL: What happened, can you describe what happened when you saw the Ku Klux Klan?

MR. KEARNEY: The come in there and do a lot of dirt.

MR. VANCIL: When was this?

MR. KEARNEY: Oh, that was way back younder, I can't tell you the year it was, but I know I seen 'em coming in and beat up and do things that they shouldn't done and got by with it. I couldn't near name what I've seen them do.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was that in Mississippi or Memphis?

MR. KEARNEY: That was in Memphis and Mississippi, too.

DR. CRAWFORD: Before you left?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir. Because a colored person wasn't getting around fast in them days and the Ku Klux Clan would be on you.

MR. VANCIL: Did you ever have any experiences with them?

MR. KEARNEY: No sir.

MR. VANCIL: They never came after you?

MR. KEARNEY: No sir. See, I always stayed close to the main house there with old Master.

MR. VANCIL: What about in Memphis though?

MR. KEARNEY: When I was in Memphis why that was after freedom. After you done got clear of all things, hear tell of them here but they didn't bother me because I always stayed around home. And I don't get out now like I used to.

MR. VANCIL: Well, they aren't around too much any more.

MR. KEARNEY: I'm not around it. But getting out you

know at night and things like that. But when I did my progressing, why it was in the day and when night come, I'd back myself up under a shady place and go to sleep. I slept in the cemetary a many a time, just go out there and make me a bed and go to sleep. Why, because I know there ain't nobody coming in there in the night and bother me.

DR. CRAWFORD: Taht's right they didn't come in the cemetary at night, did they?

MR. KEARNEY: They wouldn't come in there to bother you.

MR. VANCIL: So you slept there?

MR. KEARENY: I would go out there and lay my head on a cemetary grave there and sleep all I want.

MR. VANCIL: Wouldn't you be scared?

MR. KEARNEY: No sir.

MR. VANCIL: How come?

MR. KEARNEY: Because they ain't gonna bother you. They done when they leave here, they sleeping they ain't bothering nobody.

MR. VANCIL: Aren't ghosts supposed to stay around cemetaries?

MR. KEARNEY: No, they ain't gonna bother you. No sir that don't bother you. I've seen people running and scared, but they don't bother me. They ain't never bothered me.

MR. VANCIL: Do you believe in ghosts?

MR. KEARNEY: I believe in them. I've heard them and I've looked at them, almost looked at them.

MR. VANCIL: You've almost seen ghosts of dead people?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir. I have had them to run away from me. But a ghost, a thing like that, jump fences and everything else.

DR. CRAWFORD: I'll bet when they saw you in a cemetary sometimes at night, people would run from you wouldn't they?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir. They ain't gonna bother nobody in the cemetary.

MR. VANCIL: Did you ever hear about the Klu Klux Klan lynching any black people?

MR. KEARNEY: Oh, yes sir. They'd do it but that was way back younder in them days of old.

MR. VANCIL: Did you ever see that happen?

MR. KEARNEY: No sir, I haven't never seen them lynch nobody, not the Ku Klux Klan, I didn't that but they said that they did it. Because Old Master, you know if you did something he would have your head chopped off, chop your feet off or break your neck. They had the gallos down there and one tree that grows that they taken for that tree and that was a blackjack.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was that on the plantation?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was it close to the house?

MR. KEARNEY: No sir, it was down in the woods. They carried that blackjack tree in there where the gallos was and they had a chopping block there. And if they didn't break your nrek they would chop your head off.

MR. VANCIL: How do you feel about white people now. Do you have any bad feelings about them?

MR. KEARNEY: No sir, I got none. I just feel like this about the white people--they just like me. When that was over with, they give it up. See that race has done gone on that did all of that. And this is a different race of people and they got a different mind. Just like me, I got a different mind to what you got. My mind I feel like whatever I ask the Lord for I get it whether it comes in one way or the other. I ain't out there working for it but somebody comes along and give me that when I done want it and I ain't hit a lick for it. And then again I feel like if I get hungry and trust him, you'll feed me, you'll give me something to eat, somebody else will give me something. That's the way I travelled, that's the way I do. That's the way I do today. I don't feel like I get fed upon a night a plenty. Why? Because it ain't in me, just have to grow up in me like that. I just trust in Jesus for mine and he opens the way for me to get it without worrying.

DR. CRAWFORD: You've had a lot of trust, haven't you?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir. All my hopes is in him.

DR. CRAWFORD: And you have worked real hard too, haven't you?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir, I've worked at all kinds of work--firing, railroading, ore mining, rock pouring I've did all of that. And when I could see I've fired brick for years. You look at that and it's so hot until it looks white. And I fired on the road, looking at stokers when they was burning owwd, in place of burning coal they had wood. They burned it so many years and when they quit burning wood, they'd burn coal. They fired coal then and they quit this stopping all up and down the railroad getting wood. They had one place they would get the coal and that's where it was, the headquarters. You'd fill it up and have to stop and everything to load up and get out and go on.

MR. VANCIL: You've seen and done a lot.

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir.

MR. VANCIL: Had a lot of time to do it in, too.

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir, I reckon I have because I've burnt lime and burnt brick and I burnt ore at the ore mill, had to fire down until just iron ore would be used in hammers and things and it would run like water. Just run it in a mould and when it comes out and gets cold why it's what you want made.

DR. CRAWFORD: What state was that in?

MR. KEARNEY: It was Sheffield, Alabama. It's an oring mill.

MR. VANCIL: Mr. Kearney, I noticed a picture of Dr. Martin Luther King up there above you--I'm wondering, when the civil rights movement started around here and when blacks started pushing for their rights more, what did you think about that?

MR. KEARNEY: I think it's just one thing about it because they was fighting for the right thing, but at the same time, it was different than I would be.

MR. VANCIL: It was different than you would be?

MR. KEARNEY: In a way because whatever I was going to do, get it done quiet, wouldn't be having no big name to go by, just kind of like praying for a soul, you got confidence in it and you look to the Lord to do it why you go on ahead and do it and then tell everybody how you did it afterward. Don't get out and just take a bunch. Of course now, it's all right, but I wouldn't

have did it that way.

MR. VANCIL: If it had been up to you then you wouldn't have had those marches or those kind of thing?

MR. KEARNEY: I might, but I would have been different marching, I'd been different. He'd get out and walk the streets. I would sit down and take me a break, just sit there and talk to the Lord and that going on and ain't nobody saying nothing about it. Ain't nobody see it. Just sitting, sit and talk to him. Just like I want it to be, if you are right it will pass over.

MR. VANCIL: How do you feel about Dr. King? Did you think he was a good man?

MR. KEARNEY: Well, I felt that he was an all-right man. He was fighting for right. He talked for our right, he preached for it and he was a working man, but at the same time I think that some times you have to go at things a little different.

MR. VANCIL: And so he did things differently than you would have?

MR. KEARNEY: Yeah. He did a little different than I would have been.

MR. VANCIL: Do you remember where you were the day that you heard that he was shot?

MR. KEARNEY: The day of which?

MR. VANCIL: That he was shot and killed here in Memphis.

MR. KEARNEY: Oh yeah. Let me see now, I was right here

in Memphis the day that was done and I was thinking about where I was living at and watching on TV. I was around...

MR. VANCIL: It was about nine years ago.

MR. KEARNEY: I was out here in White Station I know, but I was thinking about where I was living on Black Water or up there in town, up there in White Station. I know I was at White Station, but I just don't know what house I was in. I know when he got killed.

MR. VANCIL: How did you feel when you heard about that?

MR. KEARNEY: I hated it because how come me to--I say I hated it but I did because you are taking something that you can't give. You couldn't give him his life, why do you want to take it? I ain't done nothing to him, now why do I want to go up there and just--that's wrong. I ought to be awful sad, but I ain't I don't feel like I am. If you had done something to me to make me do that, that is different but if you done nothing to me and me and you fall out and you feel like doing it, I've got to come to you or you come to me and talk it over before it's done. I've seen men just get up fighting and go to bed the same way. Just stop fighting and go on and lay down. Why? Because that was just the blood in them, they wanted to do it. I had a man, a colored man and a white man, it must have been in Alabama. His daddy was a Head Sheriff of Alabama and he had a son named Jimmy and his name was Blacksworth. His son and a colored boy stayed there with him and they growed up together. And every morning before break of day they had to get out there and fight. And every night they come in they had to go to fighting. They eat supper and go on and go to bed together, but they had that in them to do that. See.

MR. VANCIL: Just like natural?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir. It come natural. Blacksworth told them, he said, "That's all right, when you get grown, I'm going to give you the High Sheriff of the Penitentary and let you stay there and watch them prisoners--dangerous pen." So he did, he said when he got grown he was going to do it. But they did that way every morning, what they do it for, I don't know, just nature. They growed up together and they fought together. He didn't bother them and he didn't let nobody else bother them.

MR. VANCIL: I was talking a minute ago about Dr. King being shot, do you remember the riots that happened after he was shot up in Detroit and Los Angeles. Do you remember hearing about them?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir, I heard about it.

MR. VANCIL: What did you think about that?

MR. KEARNEY: Well, I don't think that could help none. It just shows that you didn't want him or I didn't want him and everything just want to be a fighting. Just for nothing. Of course now I can't handle that because I feel like my way and their way is different because they want to do things that they won't want to do. I don't want to take your life and I don't want to see nobody do it and I don't want to come up behind you and fight for you and you done gone. You're doing something then for nothing. The thing is to try to do something to help you to make something out of yourself. Don't take what you can't give.

MR. VANCIL: Well, times have changed a lot, haven't they? A time you can remember when you were a slave and now today we got a black congressman going to Washington.

Do you know Representative Harold Ford?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir, but you have to take it this way that's the Lord that worked that in there, see. He worked that up that way. He said the bottom should be at the top. Well now, if you are at the bottom and I'm at the top, you come on up there where I am at. But it takes the Lord to work that without you just walking up there taking it, you can't take it. He gives you five senses and if you study it, you'll take them five senses and go on away with it.

MR. VANCIL: Say you think that's what happened with Mr. Ford?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir. If you use that five senses, you'll make it.

MR. VANCIL: Did you ever think that there would be a day when black man would go to Washington as a Congressman to represent all the people here?

MR. KEARNEY: No sir, back in day, I didn't but now I seen it done. They've got colored people where I didn't think they would ever be. Why? Because back in them days they didn't teach you nothing, see. And nowadays the white man and the colored man just side by side. They go and sit down at the table and eat together, go in these high schools together and teach one another.

MR. VANCIL: Are you happy to see that?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir, I'm really happy to see them get together like that.

MR. VANCIL: Are you happy to see Congressman Ford go to Washington?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir. I'm glad to see it. Why?

Because if you do that and get along why, you'll do more after a while.

MR. VANCIL: So what do you think will happen the next ten or twenty years? Do you see?

MR. KEARNEY: Well, we will all be side by side then. In the next twenty years if it keeps on like it's going now, we'll walk side by side, brothers and sisters.

MR. VANCIL: Do you think there will be a time when whites and blacks will marry each other and that kind of thing.

MR. KEARNEY: I didn't think it but I know it now. I didn't think that would ever happen but it happened.

MR. VANCIL: Is it a good thing?

MR. KEARNEY: I think it is. As long as they can do that and get along without a squabble, I think it is a blessing from the Lord.

MR. VANCIL: What do you think of politicians in general? Do you think politicians are honest people, do you think they are dishonest people?

MR. KEARNEY: Well, I can't hardly say about that because I'm not a reader. If I could read and study the book like a person that is studying it, I would know then more how to get to these things and tell somebody. By me being a person that ain't ever been to school in their life and wanted to go, I can't hardly say because there is a whole lot of things that I could get independant over

get independant over but I can't explain it and ain't no use me going into it.

MR. VANCIL: You say you wish you had gone to school?

MR. KEARNEY: Oh yes sir, I wish I had learned. I could have learned and I tried to learn.

MR. VANCIL: You did try one time?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir. But I never could keep them letters apart in my mind you know to learn how to write.

MR. VANCIL: Who tried to teach you?

MR. KEARNEY: I just picked up a book muself and tried to teach myself.

MR. VANCIL: Oh, I see, nobody else tried to teach you?

MR. KEARNEY: No sir.

MR. VANCIL: I see. Could we get Mrs. Rogers in here for a moment, I'd like to talk to her for a second? Before I do, I want to ask Mr. Kearney--did you see Roots on television you know where they cut the man's foot off?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir, I seen some of it but I didn't see it all because I wasn't paying no attention to it until just about the last part of it.

MR. VANCIL: Well, did you think it was realistic, did you think it was true.

MR. KEARNEY: That was right, yes sir.

MR. VANCIL: Mrs. Rogers, you saw most of Roots, didn't you?

MRS. ROGERS: Uh huh.

MR. VANCIL: You were telling me before that it was much like Mr. Kearney had told you.

MRS. ROGERS: Yeah, he had told us off and on about how they would sell the people and how they would whip them and how they would do different things like that to them.

MR. VANCIL: Has he told you many stories like that?

MRS. ROGERS: Yeah, he has told us that off and on, you know how they would do them and on like that.

MR. VANCIL: Can you remember some of the stories he told you?

MRS. ROGERS: Well, he said that they never did get any paper, you know their work and all like that. And he said that whenever they would have children you know, and some childrens com in. The children grow up and then they would sell the children. They didn't allow them to have no kind of schooling at all. And sometimes they would have those white children and black children together and they would be trying to learn how to read and write and then if the child's daddy would catch up with that and find out that that child know how to do anything like reading and writing then they would punish that child, you know and on like that. But he said that he didn't even see a school, he didn't know what a school was in none of his time and Grandpa nor him either one. They never did get near a school.

MR. VANCIL: So when you saw Roots it was like some of the things...

MRS. ROGERS: Some of the things that he had--that's the reason why I got really interested in it after I looked at and it refreshened my mind to the things that he had told me on down through the years.

MR. VANCIL: Would you have believed Roots if you hadn't heard your father's story?

MRS. ROGERS: Well, I don't know whether I would or not, I mean I just couldn't see how some of those things would have been possible to do you know. But after he had told me about it and it just looked like to me I really had seen it, it come to me so plain.

MR. VANCIL: Just like all his stories were coming true?

MRS. ROGERS: Uh huh, like it was just a story coming true when I seen it on TV like that.

MR. VANCIL: What were your reactions, what kind of emotions did you feel when you saw it?

MRS. ROGERS: Well some of it really, kind of happened the way some of it, like I seen some of it, you know just like I saw drag a man you know try to get away from them and he caught that man and put the lines around him and he drag him all the way back to the house. And like this man was trying to get away and they caught him and they throwed that net around him and cut his toe off and on like that. I guess I am just tender hearted anyway but anybody live and chop their toe off and you know like that, that just don't even make you feel too good.

MR. VANCIL: Yeah. Now you are Mr. Kearney's step-daughter, right?

MRS. ROGERS: Yeah.

MR. VANCIL: When did he marry your mother, do you remember?

MRS. ROGERS: I don't remember. I think we were around about--I think I was around six years old when Mama and Daddy got married.

MR. VANCIL: I don't mean to pry but can I ask how old you are now?

MRS. ROGERS: I'm 57.

MR. VANCIL: 57?

MRS. ROGERS: Uh huh.

MR. VANCIL: So that would have been about fifty years ago that they got married. Do you remember how old your mother was at that time?

MRS. ROGERS: No, I don't. Mama never did get to go to school or anything like that and she just, this was you know telling us something like that. Well, now my brother is a year older than I am. Now, he remembers all that stuff and all like that, but he is older than I am.

MR. VANCIL: Does he live around here?

MRS. ROGERS: My brother?

MR. VANCIL: Yes.

MRS. ROGERS: Uh huh.

MR. VANCIL: What is his name?

MRS. ROGERS: Willie Kearney.

MR. VANCIL: Do you have a phone number that I could reach him at.

MRS. ROGERS: 942-1091.

MR. VANCIL: 942-1091?

MRS. ROGERS: Uh huh.

MR. VANCIL: And he is Willie Kearney?

MRS. ROGERS: Willie Kearney.

MR. VANCIL: And that would make him also the stepson of Mr. Kearney?

MRS. ROGERS: Uh huh.

MR. VANCIL: And you say he is 58?

MRS. ROGERS: Yeah, he works at International Harvester but you would catch him only at night.

MR. VANCIL: Yeah, we can call him sometime.

Well, that means Mr. Kearney that you must have been fairly old when you married Mrs. Rogers' mother.

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir.

DR. CRAWFORD: Because that was about 1926 or so, wasn't it?

MRS. ROGERS: Something like that.

DR. CRAWFORD: You would have been born about 1920, wouldn't you?

MRS. ROGERS: Yeah, I was.

MR. VANCIL: So now Elton is your grandson?

MRS. ROGERS: Well, really my brother--there is a long story about this. It is my brother's daughter's child, but she left this baby here when he was four months old and I adopted the baby.

MR. VANCIL: I see. So your brother's daughter, that would have been your niece, so he is your niece's son?

MRS. ROGERS: Yeah.

MR. VANCIL: I see. And do you have children of your own?

MRS. ROGERS: I have one daughter.

MR. VANCIL: And where is she now?

MRS. ROGERS: She is Roderick's mama.

MR. VANCIL: Oh, I see. She lives in Memphis, too.

MRS. ROGERS: She lives over here on Raymore.

MR. VANCIL: Your husband is not alive?

MRS. ROGERS: No.

MR. VANCIL: I see. How long have you and Mr. Kearney lived together, all your life?

MRS. ROGERS: You mean Daddy?

MR. VANCIL: Yeah.

MRS. ROGERS: Well, I've never been out of the house with him. When I was married, I don't think I stayed married over a year or two, something like that but I never did move out of the house. I've always been with them all of my life.

MR. VANCIL: I see. So you've always lived together?

MRS. ROGERS: Always.

MR. VANCIL: And always in Memphis, too?

MRS. ROGERS: Yeah.

MR. VANCIL: I see. So that would have been since 1926. Always in Memphis. And how long have you lived at this particular house?

MRS. ROGERS: We've been here around about six years or seven, something like that.

MR. VANCIL: You've lived in various home around Memphis?

MRS. ROGERS: We lived in White Station, Berclair and on like that.

MR. VANCIL: I see.

MRS. ROGERS: When we moved here, we moved here from Arkansas, I think that's where we moved from.

MR. KEARNEY: That's right.

MRS. ROGERS: We moved to Berclair. That's down there on the place where he used to be the fireman at the Green House.

MR. KEARNEY: On Perkins Avenue.

MR. VANCIL: Well, were you born in Memphis?

MRS. ROGERS: No, I was born in Arkansas.

MR. VANCIL: I see. And that's, Mr. Kearney where you married her mother?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir.

MR. VANCIL: And what was her name again?

MRS. ROGERS: My mother? Susie Kearney.

MR. VANCIL: Susie Kearney. OK. Well, I don't have any more questions, do you Dr. Crawford?

DR. CRAWFORD: Let's see, where was it that Mr. Kearney married your mother?

MRS. ROGERS: That was in some part of Arkansas.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was it Augusta or New Augusta, somewhere over in there?

MRS. ROGERS: Something like that when they got married. When they married, I was just a little bitty

thing.

MR. VANCIL: How do you spell your first name?

MRS. ROGERS: A-L-I-N-E

MR. VANCIL: Just one L. And is it R-O-G-E-R-S?

MRS. ROGERS: R-O-D-G-E-R-S

MR. VANCIL: R-O-D-G-E-R-S, OK.

MRS. RODGERS: When we first moved, Daddy worked all his life and I never knowed him to earn in all his work in over $40.00 in a weeks time since he ever worked because one while he wasn't getting over $10.00. And when his first social security check, and that's been a lont time, he didn't draw but $10.00 and that was because that man where he worked ther didn't turn his money in or something like that. And they told him that he had over $900.00 here that you never would get. And now he don't get what he is supposed to. I mean, his and Mama's income together now is only $200.00 a month and that is...

MR. VANCIL: That's what he gets now in social security?

MRS. RODGERS: Him and Mama together. That's what we live out of.

MR. VANCIL: About $200.00 a month?

MRS. RODGERS: Well, his is $107.00 and hers is $105.00.

MR. VANCIL: That's about $212.00 or $215.00.

MRS. RODGERS: Uh huh. And here lately, they've been getting a little SS check, it's $28.00 apiece.

MR. VANCIL: That's all the money that you have to live on?

MRS. RODGERS: Yeah

MR. VANCIL: NOw, that's since Mr. Kearney hasn't worked at the church.

MRS. RODGERS: Well, he wasn't getting a real salary there. They was just giving him a little something like that. But I mean just money that we had to really live on and all like that. Because he cut yards and things and he would take that money. In fact of the business he didn't earn too much over there because he would have to pay different ones to carry him to and from back out there and on like that and buy little stuff he need and on like that and so that just hope him along, you know like that.

MR. VANCIL: Who all lives here, your father, you, Elton Kevin and who else? There was another lady I saw once?

MRS. RODGERS: My mother.

MR. VANCIL: That's your mother?

MRS. RODGERS: Uh huh.

MR. VANCIL: Your wife, Mr. Kearney?

MR. KEARNEY: Yes sir.

MR. KEARNEY: She's still living?

MRS. RODGERS: Yeah.

MR. VANCIL: I wasn't aware of that. I thought that she was not alive.

MRS. RODGERS: She is alive, too.

MR. VANCIL: I saw her walk through. How old is she now?

MRS. RODGERS: Mama is pretty close to her nineties. Mama is about 83 years old.

MR. VANCIL: Eighty three. So she lives in the house here

with you all. I didn't know that.

MRS. RODGERS: Yeah, my mother's been sick for the last about ten or twelve years. She has heart trouble and high blood pressure and stuff like that.

DR. CRAWFORD: She was born about 1894 or so and would have been about 26 when you were born, something like that, wasn't she?

MRS. RODGERS: When I was born?

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes.

MRS. RODGERS: Mama said that I was born in 1919, that's what she has always told me.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yeah, well that would be right, I was just within a year because I didn't know the year you were born.

MR. VANCIL: But she's still alive. Well, Mr. Kearney you didn't tell us that your wife was still living?

MRS. RODGERS: I thought you all knew Mama was alive.

MR. VANCIL: I had no idea until I saw her walk through.

MRS. RODGERS: You know, wait a minute. I'll be right back.

MR. VANCIL: But you don't remember what year it was that you married?

MRS. RODGERS: This was made on his birthday, his 106th birthday the came out and made that.

DR. CRAWFORD: It woudl have been about 25 or 26.

MRS. RODGERS: That's her.

MR. VANCIL: That's her, right there.

DR. CRAWFORD: That's a good picture.

MRS. RODGERS: A man from the Press Scimitar came out and made these on his birthday in June last year.

DR. CRAWFORD: We'll see if we can get some pictures on his birthday this year. I hope we can.

MRS. RODGERS: Mama, come in here and let these people see you, they think you are not alive.

MR. VANCIL: Hello, Mrs. Kearney, how are you?

MRS. KEARNEY: Good, how are you?

MR. VANCIL: Pretty good. Mr. Kearney had told us about you but we didn't know that you were still alive. We didn't know that you lived here.

DR. CRAWFORD: You've certainly taken good care of him.

MRS. KEARNEY: Well, I don't know who taken care of me.

MR. VANCIL: Do you remember what year it was that you and Mr. Kearney were married?

MRS. KEARNEY: No sir, I sure don't.

DR. CRAWFORD: About 1925 or 26, I'll bet.

MRS. KEARENY: Somewhere along there.

MR. VANCIL: Do you remember where it was?

MRS. KEARNEY: In Augusta, Arkansas.

MR. VANCIL: And then you came to Memphis a few years after that?

MRS. KEARNEY: That's right.

MR. VANCIL: And you've always lived here. And Mrs. Rodgers tells me tht you're 83 years old.

So when you were married, was Mr. Kearney a good deal older than you were?

MRS. KEARNEY: Well, he didn't look like he was.

DR. CRAWFORD: He doesn't look like he is now.

MR. VANCIL: He's always had a young look about him, huh?

MRS. KEARNEY: Right.

MR. VANCIL: Was he a dashing young man in those days?

MRS. KEARNEY: Uh huh.

DR. CRAWFORD: He still is.

MRS. RODGERS: His father when he died, he was a dashing young man--when Grandpa died walked just as straight, he didn't have a bend nowhere about him.

MRS. KEARNEY: We have a picture here when he was here before, didn't we?

MRS. RODGERS: Uh huh.

MR. VANCIL: Are you talking about Ned Kearney?

MRS. RODGERS: Uh huh.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, that's Ned Kearney's picture, isn't it?

MRS. RODGERS: No, that's Daddy. This picture was made of him at the church one Sunday.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, he looks sort of like his daddy, doesn't he?

MRS. RODGERS: See, Grandpa let his whiskers grow out and Grandpa let his hair grow out. If Dad let his whiskers and his hair and things grow out, he would look more like Grandpa did. But Daddy keeps them cut down. We try to get him into growing them natural, but every once in a while he will ease to the barber shop and get it all cut off.

MR. VANCIL: Well, I don't have any more questions.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, thank you so much Mr. Kearney we've learned a lot about the old days again.

MR. KEARNEY: You welcome.

DR. CRAWFORD: This is a correction concerning the three great, great grandchildren of Mr. Joe Kearney. The spellings are: 1) L-A-T-A-N-I-S-H-A 2) W-A-R-R-E-N 3) L-A-K-E-Z-A. Correct 14 under the great grandchildren from Jerry Mason to Jerry Thompson.

THIS IS THE ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE OF MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY. THIS PROJECT IS "THE JOE KEARNEY PROJECT." THE PLACE IS MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE. THE DATE IS FEBRUARY 26, 1976. THIS IS INTERVIEW NUMBER TWO AND IS WITH JOE KEARNEY. THE INTERVIEW IS BY CHESTER MORGAN OF MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY AND IS TRANSCRIBED BY BARBARA WASSER.

MORGAN: The last time we talked, Mr. Kearney, you started out telling me about your very early life in Mississippi and told me that you didn't know exactly when you were born.

KEARNEY: No sir. I didn't know it.

MORGAN: You talked about the war and your father's part in the war, do you ever remember seeing any Union soldiers?

KEARNEY: Any soldiers? I seen them when the Yankees come through to let us know about you is free, you know, I seen them.

MORGAN: Well, you remember that, then.

KEARNEY: Yes sir, I remember them, because I was at the house when they come through there and they was getting the silver and everything out of the way. And when they come in, why, they didn't have to go into the stores, they just had that smokehouse open and all the food they had in there. They had barrels of flour, meal, venison, meat, turkey, squirrels, quails. All that was in the smokehouse, but we didn't get that. That was just for them. What we got was fatback and corn cakes.

MORGAN: Now what was in the smokehouse? Who did the food in the smokehouse belong to you're talking about?

KEARNEY: It belonged to my old master then.

MORGAN: Oh, OK. So you can remember when the troops came through.

KEARNEY: Yes, I can remember that because I was out there in the yard when they come in and they had on the blue suits and they was riding horses. They come in there and open that smokehouse and put all that food out there on the ground and told them to come and get it.

MORGAN: Who put it out on the ground?

KEARNEY: The Yankees did. They opened that smokehouse and pulled all that food out of there and we got nothing but fatback and corn cakes, all except Sunday. Now we had two biscuits to a person around. That's the only flour they give you. And you eat two bisucits. After you ate that up, you didn't get no more. They allowanced your meal to you at the first of the week and if that was gone, you didn't get no more of that.

MORGAN: And this was before the Yankees come?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

MORGAN: So you can remember, did you live like a slave then, before the Yankees came?

KEARNEY: I was in the slave part, because I had to go out and help gin cotton, pack cotton in the press when they gin it, you know. Get in there and pack it with our feet, and the gin is by mule power.

MORGAN: Well, you must have been very small, though, a real youngster then.

KEARNEY: Yes, I was awful large for my size, but...

MORGAN: But you were young, just a ...

KEARNEY: Yes sir, I was young, yes.

MORGAN: Do you have any idea how old you were when the Yankees came through?

KEARNEY: No sir. I can't remember how old I was, because my mother said I was about seven years old before I went to walking and I was up a pretty good boy when they you know, used to go down to the gin when they ginning cotton and help pack that cotton in there and jump out before that mule come around again. Yes sir we had to do that you see. He pulled the gin by mule power and ox, and they made cotton with a hoe, what cotton they raised, they did it with a hoe after they broke the ground, then they'd take what they raised, the stalks and things, they raised this year, they'd put it down in the middle, and then they'd come right back there and pull the dirt over on top of that stalk with a hoe, then they put cotton seed down there on top of that and pull the dirt up on top of them seeds with a hoe. But they was making cotton. Cotton grew taller than I am now, and people would go through the fields and pick it.

MORGAN: When you were young, though, I believe you said that you didn't work in the fields?

KEARNEY: No sir, I mostly did my work around the house, for master's house. Well, I did it around the house in the day where I watched the eagles to keep from getting the children and carrying them off and shining his shoes. These shoes what he wore during the day, I shined them and they didn't have nothing to shine, but cross the toe and this heel part, cause that was brass. I had to shine it so it looked like gold.

MORGAN: Did you like doing that?

KEARNEY: I had to like it. Yes sir. I had to like it.

MORGAN: Didn't have any choice. Then you can remember what it was like to change from being a slave to being free?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes sir. I can remember that.

MORGAN: Can you tell me about what you felt like? How did you feel about it?

KEARNEY: When the Yankee come through?

MORGAN: Yes.

KEARNEY: Well, I felt different altogether, but at the same time I wasn't out where the other children was in the fields, working like they did, I was hanging around the house all the time, and they fed me mostly around the house, and I got a little better treatment than they had out there, because the children out on the plantation, the older people that wasn't able to be in the fields, they cooked and washed for them and knit socks, knit the clothes and weaved the cloth. Make it so they'd have something to wear.

MORGAN: Well, did you work around the house because you were too young to work in the fields?

KEARNEY: No sir. I worked around the house, because my mother was the cook there and I was put there for a watchman for the children, to keep the eagles from getting them. The eagles used to be bad in this country in them days.

MORGAN: They'd fly around here and pick up a child and go on. Another one would come along and see him and pick up another child and go on. I've seen them pick up children,

carry 'em off. Shot at them three or four times with a shotgun, then didn't get them.

MORGAN: Well, you had to keep them away from...

KEARNEY: Yes sir. When they'd come, when I seen them coming, I'd get them children in the house.

MORGAN: How many children did you have to watch out for?

KEARNEY: I had to watch out for four, excusing myself, and others.

MORGAN: Now, were all these Mr. Kearney's children?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

MORGAN: How old were they? Were they all younger than you were?

KEARNEY: Oh yes indeed, younger than I was. Eagles would pick 'em up. Size of the little boy I got here and a little larger, they'd pick 'em up and carry 'em off. I seen 'em carry 'em off.

MORGAN: How far was it from where you lived, the house you lived in, to the big house?

KEARNEY: To the house? Just like from here to the eating place back there. And we lived in the yard.

MORGAN: So you lived close to the big house?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, because we stayed closer than any of them, why, because they had to feed the children, other children out there in the trough with a wooden spoon--them other slaves. They fed them in the trough, and they poured the milk in there and crumbled the bread up, poured the milk in there, and the milk go down in the trough, and they standing there at that trough eating like a hog with a wooden spoon.

MORGAN: And these are the other...

KEARNEY: Slaves, yes sir.

MORGAN: How young did the children start working in the fields?

KEARNEY: How young? When they got around twelve year old they had to get out there.

MORGAN: What did they do before that?

KEARNEY: Oh, they played around on the farm. But you couldn't cross that line.

MORGAN: Now, what line was this?

KEARNEY: If you're on this plantation, you can't go over here unless you ask. You stay on your side.

MORGAN: So this would mark the boundary of Mr. Kearney's land. You shouldn't go off that. What would happen if somebody did wander off?

KEARNEY: Well, he'd get a whipping. They'd learn him not to go over there.

MORGAN: Who'd do the whipping?

KEARNEY: Well, they've got a man there to do the whipping when that time comes. The Master'd see to him giving a whipping.

MORGAN: How did you feel about Mr. Kearney? Did you like him?

KEARNEY: I liked it, when I was at it because I didn't have no other choice.

MORGAN: But I mean Mr. Kearney as a man. Did you get to know him very well?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes, I know him.

MORGAN: Tell me about him. What was he like?

KEARNEY: He was tall, dark hair, and he was a pretty good man, so far as my part about it, cause he treated us in the house all right, but them in the fields, and them had to go to the fields had to work. They had to get it. They didn't have to play, they had to get it. If he said pick him a hundred pounds a day, he meant that. He said picking him two hundred tomorrow, he meant that. If you didn't get it, why you'd get a whipping, see. But if you come up to what he said, everything worked out all right. That's what he was.

MORGAN: Well, could you say that you liked Mr. Kearney a lot or did you?

KEARNEY: Yes, I liked him, cause that was the only chance I had.

MORGAN: What about the others, the field hands, did you ever hear them talk about what they thought of him?

KEARNEY: I couldn't say nothing about them, because they didn't say nothing, because they didn't I was no where around them to know what they was doing. All I know is when they come to get their food at the end of the week, for the next week. They'd get so much meal, so much meat, so much lard. When that give out, you didn't get no more until that time come again.

MORGAN: And that's all you saw of them?

KEARNEY: Yes, that's all I see about them. But so far as going around playing and running with them, I didn't have that to do. Only playing I got with them round that gin house when I went down there to pack cotton. I'd get off in the evening when he'd

come in. We'd go down there to paly around and pack cotton. Get up in that press and pack that cotton down and jump out before the mule come around and pull that turnslought on you again. If you didn't, you'd get caught in there and it would press you up.

MORGAN: Did anybody ever get caught in there?

KEARNEY: Not that I know anything about. Cause they's all on to it. Them that was large enough to to into it, why, that's what they did. See, my grandmother and my great grandmother, they was here when the south fell. One was 115 years old and the other one was 110. My grandmother was 110 and my great grandmother was 115.

MORGAN: They were still alive at this time.

KEARNEY: Sir?

MORGAN: They were still alive?

KEARNEY: Oh yes. They were still alive.

MORGAN: Did you ever have to do anything that you didn't especially like to do?

KEARNEY: No sir. I never had to do nothing round there but see after the children and shine them shoes. Only when I had spare time I'd go down to the gin. That's all I had to do, cause my daddy was a hostler and my mother was a cook, and when--he carried them to his office--to Sardis to his office--then he come back there and worked around the house and made a little crop around there.

MORGAN: Now, tell me that again. I didn't understand that.

KEARNEY: I said, he was a hostler. When he carried him to his office.

MORGAN: When he carried Mr. Kearney, you mean?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. He carried him to his office. He

didn't go back there until he'd go back there to get him. Then when he went back and got him, then he'd go back in and putter around in the house and work a little, what you call a sharecropper. But then that was all this work he did, when he wasn't doing nothing around the house.

MORGAN: This is your father you're talking about?

KEARNEY: Yes.

MORGAN: And what kind of work did he do around the house?

KEARNEY: Do the horsing and feeding the stock that peoples had working stock, such as mules, cows, and such as that. That was his main job, was around the house. See if having their food and getting them up on time in the morning.

MORGAN: Were there any other black people who didn't work in the fields?

KEARNEY: He didn't go out there to make a regular hand...

MORGAN: Were there any others that didn't do that?

KEARNEY: Not that I knew anything about.

MORGAN: Well, he was the only one who didn't work in the fields.

KEARNEY: Oh, he was the hostler around the house. The hostler would take care of the stock, feed them, and keep them getting out on time in the morning.

MORGAN: How did he get that job, instead of being a field hand?

KEARNEY: Well, my mother was the cook, and you had to have somebody to feed that stock, get them up on time. He ring that big bell, and when he ring that bell, they all had to get up and come to that lot. He ring the first one, we get up and eat the breakfast,

and then the next time he'd ring it, that means come on to the lot and get the mules and horses out of there.

MORGAN: What time would the day start? When would he ring that bell first?

KEARNEY: Sun rise. We work from sun to sun.

MORGAN: Where would breakfast be? Where would they eat breakfast?

KEARNEY: They eat there at their homes. Where they at. Where they was staying. But then they had to eat at that time, a certain hour, and be at that lot at sunrise with them mules ready to go to the fields. Then you had to have that hoe and a cotton sack on your shoulder with cotton seed in it and go out there and plant that crop. Drop that corn in the middle and that was the first I seen about it. Had 'em working with a hoe before you ever started working with a horse, a mule. Because old master had to go to church, but he had a slide to go on. He didn't use no buggy and horse for a long time.

MORGAN: How did he go?

KEARNEY: On a slide. They'd put their Sunday clothes on and get on a slide and I'd go down and follow them until I get to the creek and drive that ox across and they'd walk a footlog across and they'd get on the slide and go on to church. And then they come to getting the mules and horses then, because they had to put the salt, just like that thing there, they put salt and sugar on there. The stock would come there and lick that salt and they'd and they'd put a pen there. And they'd get so many in there, then they'd go there and get a rope and a ladder, that's the way broke into using horses, cause didn't nobody use the horses for a long time, years after I was born. They uses a ox and when they got away from the ox, they used a mule and a horse,

cause they had them tamed then, but they were wild in the woods.

MORGAN: Tell me what that slide looked like.

KEARNEY: It was just poles nailed together, it had a piece right across this way on it, right across back there, on there, and it was about that wide or wider just where two could stand in it. It was about as long as from here to that door. Well, now, his whole family get on that slide and go on to church. When he'd get to the creek, they'd get off that slide, and I'd take and drive the ox across the creek, and then they'd get on the slide and go on to church.

MORGAN: So you had to stand on it?

KEARNEY: Yes, they'd stand up on it, because they got to church. The point is you couldn't sit down after you get across that creek, you know, your clothes get nasty.

MORGAN: So, how far was it to the church?

KEARNEY: About a mile. So you'd hook those oxen up to that slide, stand on that slide and they'd...

KEARNEY: See, if you didn't have somebody to drive them across that creek, you never would get there, because that ox is going to stop in that water to cool off and I had to go in and drive them on across the water there for them. Then they'd get on the slide whenever they'd get across and go on to church. And then when they got mules, they got a carriage. You've seen these carriages on the television, picture of them. Why, that's what they had. My father sat up on the top, they'd be down under there, drive them then to the church.

MORGAN: Well, was there any reason why they used oxen instead of horses?

KEARNEY: Well, there wasn't no horses tamed. For a long time they didn't have no way to get a

doctor, only by walking.

MORGAN: How far was the nearest doctor?

KEARNEY: Sardis.

MORGAN: How far away was that?

KEARNEY: Sometime you call the doctor today, and he'd get there tomorrow, about tomorrow evening sometime. He had to walk. Call him this morning, if he's close, he'll get there this evening. If it wasn't why it would be tomorrow sometime when he'd get there, so many patients waiting.

MORGAN: Did Mr. Kearney take pretty good care of his slaves' health?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes, sir. He watched out for them. He see to them eating, having plenty of work to do, and pulling logs. I seen women pulling logs like men.

MORGAN: Pulling logs?

KEARNEY: Piling logs up, you know, with their hands. I seen them pull logs just like a man. Toting is what I'm talking about--pile them up. Then they have somebody steady burn them all the time, cleaning up new ground, going to work.

MORGAN: Clearing land?

KEARNEY: Clearing up land. Yes, sir. A bale of cotton to the acre wasn't nothing, two bales, something like that, wasn't anything for them to raise here. They'd raise that and the lint. They'd have a certain amount of the lint of that cotton, they could tell what sort of cotton it is when they gin it, cause they had all the long length and made the slaves--they had these here--what's the name--cards. I sat in there all night nearby the church carding. Cotton had to be carded so it would be thin and they'd put it in that weaver and they'd make that

thread to knit with. Then they had that machine to make the clothes. You'd hear them clamping that all over the house: wham, wham, wham,wham, making clothes, you know. First pair of pants I had they made for me. I got grown and couldn't...

MORGAN Who made the clothes?

KEARNEY: They made it. Just made the cloth, they weave the cloth, at least, and made that pair of pants for me. Then they dyed it red and I thought I had something.

MORGAN: How much of your own clothes were made around the plantation?

KEARNEY: Oh, they made them all. They'd make for all of us.

MORGAN: Did the slaves do this work?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. Slaves do the work. A lot of them didn't do nothing else but that. Old women they didn't do a thing else but that. Knit socks, you know, for the winter time, but we went barefooted through a lot of the winter. It was about Christmas before we got any shoes. We didn't get but two apples for Christmas and many apples as it was.

MORGAN: What else did you get for Christmas?

KEARNEY: Got about three shirts, six candy, a pair of shoes. These old hard tack shoes, you know, old brogans, they called them. They had to wear, excusing that you didn't get nothing else. Then take smut and shine your shoes u to go to church, because you didn't have no other way to get them.

MORGAN: Take smut?

KEARNEY: Take soot like was spread on the chimney, you know, take that and rub it on your shoes,

kind of shine them up to go to church. We didn't have no church in them times. Only a bush arbor. We had an oak tree out in the field where we would go and pray before we would go to that bush arbor. People now stay in the house from the storm, the tornados, something like that. But the people in them days, they'd leave the house and go out there under that big oak tree till that was over. And children were following behind their parents going to that big oak tree, just like hogs, pigs following a sow, when they want to suck. They'd string out behind them with a rag over their head. Went there and stayed until that storm was over. When they got ready to go to church in the morning, like this morning they is going to church, they'd go to that big tree before they would go to that bush arbor.

MORGAN: Now where would they go after they'd go to the tree?

KEARNEY: Go to pray.

MORGAN: What's the word you're--I can't be sure I'm understanding the word you're using.

KEARNEY: I said they'd go there to pray before they would go to church.

MORGAN: What...

KEARNEY: What'd they do it for?

MORGAN: No, you're using a word there that I'm not understanding...brush arbor?

KEARNEY: Bush arbor. Yes sir. That was their church. They put some poles out there and put some like, things across it, then they get under it, just like a person building a tent.

MORGAN: Oh, OK. That would be the church, then.

KEARNEY: Yes, that would be the church. They'd go there for the church, but before they go there they'd go to that big tree first, before...

MORGAN: Why to that big tree?

KEARNEY: Well, that's where they feel like that is the best place to go and they go to that tree and nobody couldn't hear them.

MORGAN: Hmm. And that's where they went when the storm came too.

KEARNEY: When they going to be a storm, they leave the house and go there first.

MORGAN: What did they do for a preacher?

KEARNEY: A preacher? They had a preacher there just like they got now, but they were preaching different to what it was. Serve the master and do what he says, be good, be kind, you be all right, you get no whipping.

MORGAN: Now, this preacher be white?

KEARNEY: Colored. Colored preacher.

MORGAN: Is that all he did was be a preacher or did he...

KEARNEY: Oh, yes he worked, but then he preached, he teached them.

MORGAN: So he was a regular hand too.

KEARNEY: Yes sir. Didn't none on the slave side and didn't have to work. All of them worked. When they got big enough, they had to carry, tote water out there, a bucket of water, they have to do something.

MORGAN: Tell me some more about that sermon.

KEARNEY: Sermon?

MORGAN: About what he would preach about.

KEARNEY: Oh, he'd preach about how to do, take care, do what old master said, mind him, take care of his stock, take care of his stuff. That was the teaching you got. And we did it, and if we didn't, we'd get whipped.

MORGAN: What would you get whipped with?

KEARNEY: One of these old long bull whips. They'd have a paddle for children, but some grown folks they'd stand off from there and hit them like they do a mule.

MORGAN: Do you ever remember seeing somebody get whipped?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes sir. I seen them. I seen them do it.

MORGAN: What did you think about that?

KEARNEYL Well, at that time why, I thought they was bad.

MORGAN: You thought they were getting what they deserved?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes, I had to. They said, "Go to the trial." When they get through with you, you either had to work hard or they'd kill you, break your neck. They had a gallows there. They'd do away with you right then, they didn't put it off and linger long with you. If you done something bad enough, they'd do that right then.

MORGAN: What were some of the things that were bad enough for them to do that?

KEARNEY: Like you get out there and rape somebody or something like that.

MORGAN: Did you ever see that happen? Did you ever

see anybody get hanged?

KEARNEY: I seen them hung but that was so long ago why, I don't want to talk about it, but they did hang them. They had a gallows there to hang them.

MORGAN: How many times do you remember that happening?

KEARNEY: Oh, I remember about twice. I know that if you done something bad enough, they make you dig a pit for yourself--take coal oil and burn you up.

MORGAN: You talked about a trial.

KEARNEY: Old master have a trial at his home.

MORGAN: Did you ever see one of those?

KEARNEY: When, to have a trial? I never did see it, because I didn't go up there, but I seen them have it. He passed sentence on them.

MORGAN; The old master?

KEARNEY: Yes, sir. When he passed sentence on you, that's it.

MORGAN: So he had the last say?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. But then, there was so many of them, you know, that didn't get that. They got a whipping for what they done, for little things. But when you done something bad enough, why they do away with you right then, because they want that.

MORGAN: Was Mr. Kearney fair about things like that?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes, he was fair, as far as I know, he was fair about it.

MORGAN: Did you ever question in your mind whether he should have a right to do that, to hang

somebody? Did you ever...

KEARNEY: Well, at that time, why, we didn't have no other choice.

MORGAN: But it never even crossed your mind to question it?

KEARNEY: No, sir. No, sir, I did not. But those things would happen. It's happening now, but what can you do about it? You can't do nothing about it, cause they going to do it. Some people got a mind to do bad things and there is some people got a mind to do good things, and don't do nothing else. But them that's doing bad, they going to do it until they die, just like it is right now.

MORGAN: Let's talk about the war just a little bit. Did you know that if the South were to lose the war they you'd be free? Were you aware of that while it was going on?

KEARNEY: No sir. Because we didn't know so much until the Yankees come through. I didn't, and I was right there in the house where you might say, stayed in the yard you might call it.

MORGAN: Did the white people ever talk about the war much?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes sir, they'd talk about it.

MORGAN: What would they say?

KEARNEY: They would say, they'd be fighting, in other words, why they'd want to win a victory, because the North was going to win the victory, and that was the crying time when they got on that, when the North whipped the South.

MORGAN: How did you feel about that?

KEARNEY: I tell you, the way I felt about it, why I didn't have no other choice but to feel glad to kn ow that I'd be a free person in that war.

MORGAN: When did you figure out that you'd be a free person if the North won?

KEARNEY: I couldn't tell you exactly now when I did it, but that is when they were fighting, and my mother would come out and tell us what was going on and we'd be glad to see it happen, but I didn't know what side to take on directly, because I didn't know how it was going, but I know that slave time was a mean time for us poor folks. Why, we were getting along all right, but then at the same time, we had to work so hard and on time that you wouldn't go like you go now. So we'd get up in the morning at sunup and stay out there until dark and you had a certain amount to get. If you didn't, you'd get a whipping, so that's why we wanted to change.

MORGAN: When those Yankee soldiers came through, were you glad to see them?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

MORGAN: Tell me about what they did. You mentioned taking the food out. Did they give that to the slaves?

KEARNEY: They taking it and throwed it out there and told them to come and get it.

MORGAN: This is all the good meat from the smokehouse they throwed it out on the ground. Barrels of flour of meat, all them ham shoulders, all them quail--they throwed it out

there for them come and get it.

MORGAN: Then did they just leave?

KEARNEY: Yes, sir, they left after they got it. After them slaves got it they left and they didn't do nothing about it. Why, because they, you know, they done put it out there for them, and they couldn't put it back, because they'd come back, that's the on thing.

MORGAN: Soldiers come back?

KEARNEY: The Yankees would come back.

MORGAN: How far away were they? Where were they stationed?

KEARNEY: They stayed in Sardis.

MORGAN: What did most of the slaves do at that time?

KEARNEY: Didn't do nothing, most of them, but get that food, all they could.

MORGAN: Waht happened when the food ran out?

KEARNEY: They went to work then.

MORGAN: Where would they go to work?

KEARNEY: In that field. But it was different. Everything was free to you then. You could get so much to do, you see, at the time.

MORGAN: What about land? Did any of them...

KEARNEY: Oh, yes sir. They give them land to work.

MORGAN: Who would give them land to work?

KEARNEY: The old master would give them that property to work on yes. And when they worked, they got their price for their stuff. But they didn't get as much, and when the Yankees come through there, a crying time, cause they were scared to go out

there, becasue they had been slaves so long, you know, scared to go get it, so they told them, just have to come and get it. And then they fell in there. Had barrels of sugar, there barrels of flour and stuff. They got it.

MORGAN: Now, did you keep living in the same house?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes sir. We stayed there until--I don't know what time. I hardly know when we left there, cause it's so long. But we stayed in the same house. We didn't leave there because the Yankees come through and said we was free.

MORGAN: Well, what changed in your own life?

KEARNEY: In my own life I was just glad because I could go around and play with the other children, go across the line, wasn't nothing said.

MORGAN: So you didn't have to shine the shoes anymore, did you?

KEARNEY: No, sir. I didn't have to.

MORGAN: What changed for your father? Did things change for him much?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes. Of course. He come out himself then, getting around among people then.

MORGAN: What do you mean by "getting around"?

KEARNEY: He'd go on the other side of the line then. Go around from one line to another one, have a talk, and talk with one another, and get around. But you couldn't do it before. If you did, you asked if you could do it--old master. Had to slip around to one another. Didn't have to keep them from hearing you talk. You could talk out like I'm talking right now.

MORGAN: Well, what about work? What kind of work did you do after the Yankees came through?

KEARNEY: Oh, they went to farming then, right on the shares.

MORGAN: Did your father do that?

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

MORGAN: How much land did he work?

KEARENY: Well, he worked 25 or 30 acres.

MORGAN: He sharecropped. He went from being a riding boss to sharecropping when the war ended.

KEARNEY: Yes sir.

MORGAN: Were all the tenants after the war black? Were there any white tenants?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes, there were some white, but they was off to themselves. They was on one side and we was on the other side. It wasn't mixed up like it is now.

MORGAN: Did you ever see them day to day?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes.

MORGAN: How did you get along?

KEARNEY: We got along all right, cause they were slaves like we was. They had to do the same thing we was doing, so we all got along about the same.

MORGAN: Now, you said "slaves". Did you mean "sharecroppers"?

KEARNEY: Exactly, but see, we were slaves and then after they freed us, why then all of us come to go to sharecropping doing different work. All got along as one then. Only some of them was scared to go around like we should, till they broke in. You know, some of them scared anyhow right now. I don't care how you treat them, they'll be scared.

MORGAN: Going back, talking about the time before slavery ended, how did your father, being a riding boss, how did he get along with the other slaves?

KEARNEY: Well, he got along all right. Yes, he got along all right, because he was right at the door where the food comes out. He got along all right, because when they go to ration it out, why he had to hand it out. They had to weigh it out to them, so he giving it to them at the same time and he got along all right with them.

MORGAN: Did you say they issued that food once a week?

KEARNEY: Once a week. Not once, but once a week. Every week you've got so much flour, so much meal, and so much meat, and so much lard, and your butter, molasses. All that was issued to you. Milk was for the children. They'd get the feed out of there and they'd feed them like they'd feed a pig now. But they had a trough and they'd crumble that bread up in there and they'd pour so much milk in that it could run down, just like a gutter out in the rainwater. Run down there with that bread mixed with that milk.

MORGAN: This is for the children?

KEARNEY: For the children to eat. And they eat it.

MORGAN: How many times a day did they eat like this?

KEARNEY: They'd eat it every morning and every night. You fed them when they come in, just like you do a pig. With a wooden spoon too. Wasn't no silver spoons, wooden spoons.

MORGAN: Now when you saw that going on, how did you feel about that?

KEARNEY: I felt all right, because I didn't know no better at that time.

MORGAN: And it never seemed unnatural or anything to you?

KEARNEY: No.

MORGAN: Well, after the war, there'd be a commissary for you.

KEARNEY: Yes.

MORGAN: Where tenants could get their supplies?

KEARNEY: That's where you'd go get your food then. And you could go get it, so much you want, what you wanted then. Get your meat and meal, flour and everything else. But before then, why you didn't get flour but once a week and they give you so much. They don't care how many in a family, but just one biscuit, or two biscuits, around. And they had a skillet with lead been cooking in the fireplace. When we cook in the fireplace we had some brown paper. We make the dough all up and roll it out and put it in that paper and wet it and put it in the ashes in the fireplace, and when that paper burned off after it was done and it was brown. Corncakes, you put that in the ashes, and put some cold ashes on top of it and then put some hot ashes on top of that and when that get done, it's brown and that's cornbread.

MORGAN: What else did you eat? You yourself.

KEARNEY: Me, myself?

MORGAN: I'm talking about before slavery...

KEARNEY: Before the Yankees?

MORGAN: Before the Yankees came.

KEARNEY: I ate just like they did. I was at the house. But they'd eat on top of the table, then I down under there and they'd hand me mine down under the table.

MORGAN: Under the table?

KEARNEY: Yes sir. They'd eat here on top of the table and I'd be sitting down under the table, on the

table, on the floor. Why, they'd hand me my food down there. I'd eat there.

MORGAN: But you'd eat the same food?

KEARNEY: I'd eat the same food they eat, but I didn't get out there on the farm, because I was watching the children. You see, I had to take care of the children.

MORGAN: So you really ate a lot better than others...

KEARNEY: A lot better food. Got along better, because what they ate, them children ate, I ate, you see, cause they feed me, and I've been nursing ever since.

MORGAN: After the war, now, did any blacks own their own land?

KEARNEY: No, sir.

MORGAN: Can you remember the Freedman Bureau?

KEARNEY: Yes. The way they got their land, they going to clean up so much land, get it cleaned up, then you, just like somebody clean up the place there then you donate that, that property is yours, if you cleaned it up and worked it. That's your land, and the other side do the same with his land. And then when it got to the place where it coming to pay the taxes on the land, then they come to changing it, you see. There was no taxes.

MORGAN: So you could clear a piece of land...

KEARNEY: You could clear a piece of land, that's donated to you, if you clear it up and work it, that's your land, that's what you got. You clear so many acres, that's yours.

MORGAN: Now, was this right after the war?

KEARNEY: Yes, sir.

KEARNEY: Yes, sir.

MORGAN: How many black people...

KEARNEY: Nearly all of them. Nearly everyone I know was cleaning it up, cleaning up, working the property, working their land, because that's the only way you can get yourself out of that commissary to get your food, have to make a little money to get it.

MORGAN: So you didn't really own the land...

KEARNEY: No, sir. You really owned it, yes, sir. That is yours, when you cleared it up, that's yours. But you had to get it all, you had to keep it off. You had to keep it clean. You'd get all them logs and bushes and things off of there, clear it up, then they have you a hut put there, a little house, wasn't made out of logs, you know, build you a house, stay there. That's your house, your property.

MORGAN: Is that what your father did?

KEARNEY: Yes, sir.

MORGAN: So whatever you raised was your own, whatever...

KEARNEY: Yes, that it is. That's yours, and then you go on and, just like you buy food, then you take that and pay your bills, get your clothes with it. But you sure had to wait.

MORGAN: You talked some about going to church, but tell me about Sundays, just in general. How did you spend Sundays?

KEARNEY: I spent Sunday going to church, but I didn't get to play, see with children. We all get together and play then, but then if we going to church, every Sunday, not one,

but every Sunday, you had towash your feet, grease your legs, straighten them up, go to church. The boys didn't have no pants, during the slave, they wore long shirts all the time till they got just about grown, long shirts, and when they get just about grown then they commence to get a pair of pants to wear. Besides that you didn't get it, had to wear shirts.

MORGAN: How long would church service last?

KEARNEY: Service?

MORGAN: How long would church last on Sundays?

KEARNEY: On Sundays? Last just like they do now. Just about all day sometimes. Sometimes they'd come in early, but they'd go to that praying ground before they'd go to that church. Them slaves, they'd go there before sunup and leave out from there to church and when they'd come back home, it'd be up in the day, but that's when they eat. They didn't eat nothing until they'd go to church.

MORGAN: What would you do the rest of the day?

KEARNEY: The rest of the day, why, if you didn't go back to that bush arbor you didn't go...you didn't do nothing, but stay around home, visit one another. That's all you did.

MORGAN: That's the only day you didn't work.

KEARNEY: Yes.

MORGAN: Did you ever get to go into town? Into Sardis?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes sir. I had to go there, because I was around the house there and driving the oxen across the river when we'd to to church.

MORGAN: What do you remember about Sardis?

KEARNEY: I just remember I went there and then sat down until they come out of the church. When they

come out, then we come on back home, that's all that I can say about it. I didn't have to run around over town. I had to stay and watch that ox, keep him from going off.

MORGAN: What do you remember about the town? Do you remember anything?

KEARNEY: It was a small town. That was all I know about it, Sardis. I wouldn't know it now if I was to see it. Why...because I was in my teens, I was about 13 years old, I reckon when I was down there. I ain't been there. It ain't because I couldn't go, but then I just haven't been, cause I've tried to live like my mother and my old master teach me: a law abiding citizen. Treat everybody like I want to be treated.

MORGAN: Did you learn that from your Mother and old Mr. Kearney?

KEARNEY: Yes, sir. Yes. My mother and Dad said, "Never get into nothing, you don't have no hard words said to you. Treat a person as you would be treated. And I ain't never had any either. I ain't never been in trouble. In this town you can't find nothing on the books in the jailhouse or in the courthouse, nowhere, about me being in trouble. I know where I belong. Why, because I try to treat everybody like I want to be treated.

MORGAN: When you moved to Memphis, when your family moved to Memphis, how much did you own, what all did you pack up to bring?

KEARNEY: Bring? I don't know, because my Dad and them got a bed they brought to Memphis, old master give him, and sent a few bed clothes, and some wearing clothes, about all they brought with them down there, an old cooking stove, is all they brought with

them that I know about, but that bed is still in the family. And it was his in his lifetime, and he give it to my Dad and it is still in the family, but my brother got it. It was a hundred years old, I know when he give it to him, and my Daddy lived 111 years and he's still got it and I was born in it.

MORGAN: You born in it?

KEARNEY: Yes, sir, and they still got it. My brother got it at his house. That's the only thing we got saved that I know anything about that he had in slave times.

MORGAN: I want to save talking about Memphis until another time. Your family moved to Memphis and you stayed here awhile, but then you told me that you went back to farming.

KEARNEY: Oh, yes, I was...

MORGAN: Went down to Clarksdale, I think.

KEARNEY: Yes, sir, I wanted to...

MORGAN: Why did you decide to leave Memphis and go to...

KEARNEY: I farmed in Memphis here before I left, then I went to go get Clarksdale and went and farmed. I left Clarksdale and went to New Augusta and farmed. I lived in New Augusta about 18 years, about 17 or 18.

MORGAN: Why did you leave Memphis?

KEARNEY: I just wanted to go over there.

MORGAN: Did you rent land?

KEARNEY: Oh, no sir. I worked sharecropper until I got to New Augusta, and then I rented. And I left New Augusta and come back here and farmed here.

MORGAN: So you sharecropped in Clarksdale?

KEARNEY: Clarksdale, I...

MORGAN: What's the difference? How were things different between sharecropping and renting?

KEARNEY: Well, when you are renting, why you have to pay them so much for the land, and sharecropping you just give them half you make. And when I went to renting, why then I was in New Augusta, I rented land up there.

MORGAN: Who did you rent it from?

KEARNEY: I rented it from J. T. Snapin and John O'Hara.

MORGAN: How many other tenants?

KEARNEY: I had sharecroppers. I had three sharecroppers with me. I let them work shares with me, and I worked mine. That's it.

MORGAN: So you had a sharecropper?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes. I worked sharecroppers, at that time.

MORGAN: How many acres did you have?

KEARNEY: About a hundred acres.

MORGAN How much would you pay to rent a hundred acres?

KEARNEY: Well, I paid five bales for mine and two or three bales for theirs. And I made 16 bales a year.

MORGAN: So you'd have...

KEARNEY: I had, but sickness eat it up. My family got sick around that time, had doctors. Two and three times a day and all through the night. I had to leave there. The water had germs in it and we couldn't take it. Typhoid fever was raging, they couldn't use. I had to leave and come here.

MORGAN: Has much changed about the way you farmed

between the time you were a youngster back in Sardis...

KEARNEY: Oh, yes sir. There had been a big change, cause I'd get the fair price for the cotton. I'd get whatever they was giving. I could sell it to the real cotton man himself, just like you was a buyer, I come to you to sell my cotton to you and go on and pay my rent. But when you was sharecropping with him, why, you had to buy with them why then you had to take what they said so you got that debt off you, and they get the biggest portion of it. That's where the difference comes in. When you manage yourself and then got somebody else sharecropping with you, you give him his part, his bale, and you take your bale. That's the way that goes.

MORGAN: How would you go about finding land around when you left Memphis and went to...

KEARNEY: Well, I'd find the owner of the land and rent it from him. I had to do that.

MORGAN: How would you go about that? What would you say to him?

KEARNEY: I'd tell him that I knowed he had that land out there for rent and house. How many houses you got on it. Well, he'd tell me how much the land is worth. If it's a hundred acres or 75 acres, why then he'd tell me just what it was and what he wanted for it. Well, I just rent the whole thing and then he give me sharecroppers to put in there and then when that time come, I'd give him so many bales of cotton plus that, make his money out the rest of it come to me and my sharecropper.

MORGAN: So you paid him in cotton?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes sir, I paid him in cotton, but see the cotton was so heavy, so many bales, like I give him five bales for this, and I make fifteen bales, but I got that land. I done paid for that, but if I paid ten bales, why then I'd haul over that ten. Why, that's the end of it. See, that's the rent.

MORGAN: Did you usually come out ahead?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes sir. Come out. Three or four bales, sometimes five. I could make about $200 on the sharecropper and about three or four hundred on myself.

MORGAN: So how much would that come out to total?

KEARNEY: Oh, it would total six or seven hundred dollars a year.

MORGAN: How much of that was left over when it was paid off, everything?

KEARNEY: When I paid off everything, I had me around $300.

MORGAN: What would you spend that money on?

KEARNEY: My family, myself, buying mules--something I ought not done. Yes, I spent many dollars for mules and left them all there in the fields. Couldn't sell none when I left there because they didn't want them.

MORGAN: You just had to leave them?

KEARNEY: I just had to leave them there standing in the lot.

MORGAN: But if you had money left over it would go back into the farm?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes. If I had any left over, why then I'd use it on the farm.

MORGAN: How many children did you have when you were in New Augusta.

KEARNEY: I didn't have but two.

MORGAN: How old were they?

KEARNEY: Well, my girl is around 30 to 40 years old now, and my boy is about 50 to 60.

MORGAN: Were they old enough to work?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes. They were...

MORGAN: Both of them working?

KEANREY: Yes sir. They were both working. Yes, sir, I used to be a good farmer--had sharecroppers, made fifteen or sixteen hundred dollars a year. But sickness--man! Don't say nothing when that hits you, you got something, when the water gets bad on you. There's a certain kind of the water you can... Yes, sir I've been in a whole lot of places and ain't been in no trouble yet.

MORGAN: Could you tell me about places in north Alabama where they didn't like colored people?

KEANREY: Well, out there in them mountains you find that. White people out there, they don't know colored people. They call you a no-tail bear. And if you go in there, they got an old shotgun, suddenly they'll shoot you down, because they're scared of you. I went through that part of the country. I went to Pencil Mill and the line was just like that line, because they'd get you, and as long as I'd stay up on that railroad, it was all right, but if I stepped off over on that side, they'd get you. They'd throw blocks, bricks, anything at you. as long as you'd stay on your side, they wouldn't bother you, but if you'd step over there...

MORGAN: Where is this?

KEARNEY: North Alabama. A pencil mill out there. I go down to the pencil mill to get a job, and you talking about the blocks, they chunking like I don't know what. And I got back on that track and getting off their property, they didn't bother me. Why, because I got off their property, but if I get on their property, sure to get you. They'd do it.

MORGAN: Just cause you were black?

KEANREY: Yes sir. They call you a no-tail bear at that time.

MORGAN: Let me ask you again. Did it ever bother you that there were places you couldn't go and things you couldn't do?

KEARNEY: No sir, because I always stayed hid when I was in the wrong place and when I got in the right place, I stayed on my side, see. If you go through a place, you up in a boxcar where they can't get to you, they'll never see you, but whenever you get to where you can get out, why you jump down and to to where you are going, cause for 90 miles I didn't have nowhere to stop, to get out on the railroad or nowhere else till I went over that 90 miles. When I went over that 90 miles I opened that door and get out, get all right. But if they seen you, they'd kill you, for they setting all along side the track with shotguns and rifles.

MORGAN: I believe you said that you worked around Birmingham, is that right?

KEARNEY: I did. I worked at Sheffield; I worked in a rolling mill there, melting ore to make the railroad rails and one stuff or another. I worked there and I worked at Montgomery. I worked there washing...washing ore so you could carry it to

the rolling mill. I worked at Russellville mill. Worked there, digging ore, cutting ore, and I burnt lime in Russellville. I was a good burner. It'd take 14 days to get it hot, another 14 days to burn it. I had to stay in the woods then to burn it. I couldn't leave it. I had to stay there day and night and take my nap.

MORGAN: You worked in a rock quarry, too, I believe.

KEARNEY: Yes, I worked in a rock quarry, cutting stone for these two cemetaries. Go in there and take that stone and cut that stone out.

MORGAN: Didn't you tell me that was pretty dangerous?

KEARNEY: It was.

MORGAN: Why was it so dangerous?

KEARNEY: Well, because when there's a man up there so high, when he's drilling, if he jump off of there, he was dead, and he's liable to jump down there. Then if that mountain caves it slides, and it'll kill you, just come right down on you. But I've seen it slide--when they first commenced to bring in those Italians in here, why I seen it slide, a mountain slid and killed about 500 Italians. When they first comes to bring them in this country, the mountain slid on them.

MORGAN: This is Alabama, then?

KEARNEY: Yes, sir.

MORGAN: They brought Italians in to work?

KEARNEY: Yes sir, cause they couldn't get enough of these Southern people to go there and work, and they brought them from a foreign country over here to work, and they was, you know, working, they hadn't been used to working under a mountain like that, and they was up under there working and the whole mountian just

slid down. Got 500 of them.

MORGAN: Did you work with Italians?

KEARNEY: I wasn't working with them at that time, but I was working in that country where they was when they come in here.

MORGAN: Did you ever have much to do with them?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes. I'd go there and get my bread.

MORGAN: What were they like?

KEARNEY: Oh, they was just like they is now, only they was older people.

MORGAN: Did they speak English?

KEARNEY: Oh, yes sir. They'd talk enough so you'd understand what they was saying. And after they'd stayed here, coming to bring them in here, they got used to this country their voice changed...their language changed to ours. But before you could not understand what they was saying, because they just coming in from the Old Country, brought them in here by the thousands. Had a goat and the cooking vessels.

MORGAN: That's all they brought?

KEARNEY: Yes, sir. And they'd make them the best bread I thought that light bread was the best bread that ever I eat at that time. When they had, just like they have these barbecue pits in the yard, that's where they cook their bread and ate it. They had it fixed up like that.

MORGAN: Do you remember about when this was?

KEARNEY: It was in 1900.

MORGAN: Right around...1901 when that was, when I was

in Russellville, Alabama.

MORGAN: How far was Russellville from Birmingham? Did you live in Birmingham for awhile?

KEARNEY: I didn't stay there altogether. I stayed on the subway to the town. But I go over there to work.

MORGAN: Well, tell me...compare Birmingham to Memphis back then. How different was Birmingham?

KEARNEY: There was a great big difference. Birmingham was...I don't know, it was a pretty good sized place, but I don't know just exactly how large it was, because there was a good many people there, but I was there working. In other words, why I don't...just like Memphis now, when I come here you could run all over Memphis in an hour and wouldn't miss the time you going, so far as that concerned, and now you can't ride over it in a car in an hour. But like Birmingham, and I went there, I was working, that was the main thing I was ever after, didn't see anything about it much--like Russellville, Sheffield, Montgomery, I was all in there. But just to come down to knowing how the size of a town, it's hard for me to get at.

MORGAN: What about other things? What else was different in Birmingham from Memphis?

KEARNEY: I don't think anything was different for working, cause they give you plenty of that to do, because they had it. You could work at the rolling mill, washer, different things, washing ore, stuff, why, you had all the work you wanted to do at that time burning or whatever you call it. Not coal, but you get it hot, you know, then melt that ore, that chemical. Put it in there and that furnace get hot. Man, you can burn anything, you can burn your hand, cut it in two

with your hand, but the heat would blister you hand up.

MORGAN: Were there black and white workers at this place?

KEARNEY: Yes, sir.

MORGAN: How did they get along?

KEARNEY: They got along fine, cause every man knows his job and they went to it, know what they had to do. Cause I was a fireman and I know what I had to do and I just kept churking it to it.

MORGAN: Were there any labor unions?

KEARNEY: There were unions? Not that I know anything about at that time.

MORGAN: Did it cost about the same amount of money to live in Birmingham or in Alabama as it did in Memphis?

KEARNEY: Yes, sir, about the same.

MORGAN: Could you make more money?

KEARNEY: Couldn't make more money, because more different kinds of work going on. See then, when you left the rolling mills or washers, where they wash the roller and left that, you went to the lime in the rock quarry cutting stones. Why then you leave that and go to the rock quarry to get lime rock. You had all that to do and get up to. Why then, that was a job. When you busted all that old spoiled stuff, you had to get them to send it to the mill to grind it up. Plenty of work there and all work for amn to do. You get on a piece of stone as long as that table there and be working on it a month, making that tombstone for the cemetaries, you know. You got to get in there and you got to know how to work there with a chisel.

MORGAN: How much did you get paid for doing that?

KEARNEY: Well, you get so much an hour. They pay you about ten, twelve dollars a day. Then, why, you work by the ton, you get so much a ton, 30, 40 cents a ton, why you make ten, twelve dollars a day. Different kind of work you do, why that's why you get your pay.

MORGAN: You held several different jobs around there. Which one did you like best?

KEARNEY: I like that there one in lime. It was the best job I had.

MORGAN: Did you make more money doing that?

KEARNEY: Yes, I'd make more money because I'd get $30 a kiln. Every time I burn a kiln I made me $30, and I didn't have to get out there and sweat and toil to get it. I'd lay up there and sleep. Only at night...I couldn't sleep at night.

MORGAN: You just had to watch over that kiln all the time.

KEARNEY: Yes, watch over the kiln because I burned it. At night I had to watch for to keep the animals from getting me. But in the day, why they all back. Had to keep me a light all the time at night to keep the animals from getting you. Them animals would get you, bears, panthers, something creep up on you, cause you out there in the wild woods. Just a little path come up there to it.

THIS IS THE ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE OF MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY. THIS PROJECT IS THE "JOE KEARNEY FUNERAL". THE PLACE IS MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE. THE DATE IS FEBRUARY 6, 1983. ROBIN HOOD LANE MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH. THIS IS THE PROGRAM OF THE FUNERAL IN WHICH DR. CHARLES CRAWFORD HAD A PART.

MUSIC

THE FOLLOWING REMARKS ARE BY DR. CHARLES W. CRAWFORD ON FEBRUARY 6, 1983 AT THE FUNERAL OF JOE KEARNEY, MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH, ROBIN HOOD LANE AND PARK AVENUE, MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE.

DR. CRAWFORD: I think tonight I have one of the greatest honors I've ever had in being listed as the friend of a good man, and therefore I am very glad to say a few words as a friend of our departed brother, Joe Kearney. "To every thing there is a season and a time to every purpose under heaven. A time to be born and a time to die." Joe Kearney was born long ago. It was my privilege to meet him less than 10 years ago. In that time, since I am a historian, we travelled through time a great deal together, back and forth over where Brother Kearney had been, the road he took through life in his time. I learned much and was inspired a great deal by what I learned from this good and gentle man.

When he was very young, he learned from his parents--and he had the blessing of a good family--and from religious people the important lessons: obey the Bible, love your fellow man, treat others as you would have them treat you. Throughout life he did that. He also

heard promises that gave him faith early in life. I don't know, but I suspect he heard the promise, from the 14th chapter of the book of John. "Let not your heart be troubled, ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions, if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself that where I am there ye may be also." Joe Kearney lived life believing in these promises. (Congregation response--"Right on.")

His faith was as deep as any person I've ever known. (Congregation response--"That's right.")

He lived treating other people as he wanted them to treat him. (Congregation response--"That's right.")

He was a strong man. He lived through many things, good and bad. (Congregation response--"That's right.")

But he always trusted God, he loved others, and he was a kind and gentle person (Congregation response--"Yes sir!") and a support to all who knew him. It was an inspiration to know a man like that. (Congregation response--"That's right.") As life became long and people he loved passed away and he knew more on the other side than here, I think he began to feel as St. Paul did, expressed in the Philippian letter as: "For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain, for I am in a strait betwist two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ is far better."

But for some reason Joe Kearney was kept here a long time. (Con-

We are honored to have known this man and in his passing I believe we leave the message to those in his family: We know you will mourn, your hearts will hurt, not because it was bad that he died, but because you miss him. (Congregation response-"Amen") And because it hurts to lose people you love.

But he has gone on, setting before us the example to the younger people, I think. And for all of us, since we are all younger, he left the example that we walk as he did, and that we be inspired by this life and this lesson that he gave for all of us. So to our brother, Joe Kearney, we express our heartfelt admiration, our love, and our wishes that we may be worthy to meet him when it is our time to go, too. So to Joe Kearney it is an honor to us that we may be here to express our respect and love and to rejoice at the end of a good life. Thank you. (Congregation response--"Amen. Yes. ")

gation response) I suspect because he had so much good to do and so much inspiration to give to others. We don't see many people who give to others what he did. (Congregation response--"That's right.") So now at the end of a long journey he has gone to a better place. (Congregation response--"Yes.") He was not afraid of dying and I think it is appropriate that he be here at this time and place.

He told me that when he first came to Memphis more than a hundred years ago, one of the first things he remembered was the Baptist Church, the one on Tin-Cup Alley south of Beale Street--even the area is gone now--Pastor Fields was his pastor. He's lived through a lot of pastors; he's known some fine people. And he also gave his influence for good to many.

So now our brother has met that which he expressed such great quiet confidence in--death. He was not afraid, and I don't think he was ever afraid of anything, because he believed the Lord would take care of him. (Congregation response--"Yes.") And he knew patiently and confidently that there would be a time that God would call him and he would come. So I think in his life we see the fulfillment of the questions of St. Paul, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

In the case of our brother, Joe Kearney, at the end of a long journey he has been recieved into a greater life. (Congregation response--"Amen.")

Born in slavery, he now has been called to greater freedom than any of us have ever known. (Congregation response--"Yes.")

Living in kindness and love, he now has been called to a glory and to greater love than any of us have ever known here.